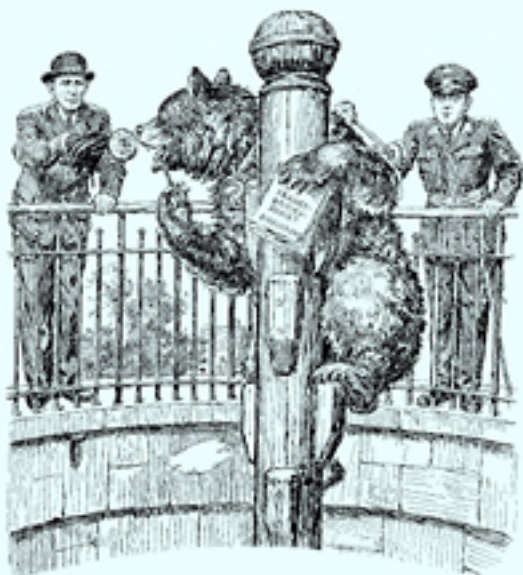


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KEITH NEILSON

Britain, Soviet Russia and  
the Collapse of the  
Versailles Order,  
1919–1939

CAMBRIDGE

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## Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939

This book is a reinterpretation of international relations in the period from 1919 to 1939. Avoiding simplistic explanations such as appeasement and British decline, Keith Neilson demonstrates that the underlying cause of the Second World War was the intellectual failure to find an effective means of maintaining the new world order created in 1919. With secret diplomacy, alliances and the balance of power seen as having caused the First World War, the makers of British policy after 1919 were forced to rely on instruments of liberal internationalism such as arms control, the League of Nations and global public opinion to preserve peace. Using Britain's relations with Soviet Russia as a focus for a re-examination of Britain's dealings with Germany and Japan, this book shows that these tools were inadequate to deal with the physical and ideological threats posed by Bolshevism, fascism, Naziism and Japanese militarism.

KEITH NEILSON is Professor of History at the Royal Military College of Canada, Ontario. His previous publications include *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia 1894–1917* (1995) and, with Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (2003).



# Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939

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Keith Neilson



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## Abbreviations

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|          |                                                         |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Adm      | Admiralty                                               |
| AHR      | <i>American Historical Review</i>                       |
| AJPH     | <i>Australian Journal of Politics and History</i>       |
| ATB      | Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War    |
| B of T   | Board of Trade                                          |
| BIHR     | <i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i> |
| BJIS     | <i>British Journal of International Studies</i>         |
| BMD      | British Military Delegation                             |
| Cab      | Cabinet                                                 |
| CAS      | chief of the Air Staff                                  |
| CBH      | <i>Contemporary British History</i>                     |
| CD       | Central Department, FO                                  |
| CEH      | <i>Contemporary European History</i>                    |
| CER      | Chinese Eastern Railway                                 |
| CHR      | <i>Canadian Historical Review</i>                       |
| CID      | Committee of Imperial Defence                           |
| CIGS     | chief of the Imperial General Staff                     |
| CJH      | <i>Canadian Journal of History</i>                      |
| CMRS     | <i>Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique</i>             |
| COS      | Chiefs of Staff Committee                               |
| D&S      | <i>Diplomacy and Statecraft</i>                         |
| DCOS     | Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee                        |
| DDMO&I   | deputy director of military operations and intelligence |
| disp     | dispatch                                                |
| DMO&I    | director of military operations and intelligence        |
| DNI      | director of naval intelligence                          |
| DOT      | Department of Overseas Trade                            |
| DPR      | Defence Policy and Requirements Committee               |
| DPR (DR) | Defence Policy and Requirements (Defence Requirements)  |
| DRC      | Defence Requirements Committee                          |

|                |                                                             |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>E-AS</i>    | <i>Europe-Asia Studies</i>                                  |
| ECGD           | Export Credit Guarantee Department                          |
| <i>EHQ</i>     | <i>European History Quarterly</i>                           |
| <i>EHR</i>     | <i>English Historical Review</i>                            |
| <i>eJIH</i>    | <i>electronic Journal of International History</i>          |
| <i>ESR</i>     | <i>European Studies Review</i>                              |
| FBI            | Federation of British Industries                            |
| FED            | Far Eastern Department, FO                                  |
| <i>FHS</i>     | <i>French Historical Studies</i>                            |
| FO             | Foreign Office                                              |
| FPC            | Committee on Foreign Policy                                 |
| GC&CS          | Government Code and Cypher School                           |
| <i>HJ</i>      | <i>Historical Journal</i>                                   |
| <i>HR</i>      | <i>Historical Research</i>                                  |
| <i>IA</i>      | <i>International Affairs</i>                                |
| IDCEU          | Inter-Departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest              |
| <i>IHR</i>     | <i>International History Review</i>                         |
| IIC            | Industrial Intelligence Committee                           |
| <i>INS</i>     | <i>Intelligence and National Security</i>                   |
| <i>JbGfGOE</i> | <i>Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas</i>                 |
| <i>JBS</i>     | <i>Journal of British Studies</i>                           |
| <i>JCH</i>     | <i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>                      |
| JIC            | Joint Intelligence Committee                                |
| <i>JMH</i>     | <i>Journal of Modern History</i>                            |
| <i>JMilH</i>   | <i>Journal of Military History</i>                          |
| JPC            | Joint Planning Committee                                    |
| <i>JSMS</i>    | <i>Journal of Slavic (formerly Soviet) Military Studies</i> |
| <i>JSS</i>     | <i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>                         |
| L of N         | League of Nations                                           |
| LNU            | League of Nations Union                                     |
| <i>MAS</i>     | <i>Modern Asian Studies</i>                                 |
| <i>MES</i>     | <i>Middle Eastern Studies</i>                               |
| ND             | Northern Department, FO                                     |
| nd             | no date                                                     |
| ns             | no signature                                                |
| PID            | Political Intelligence Department                           |
| <i>PP</i>      | <i>Past and Present</i>                                     |
| PSOC           | Principal Supply Officers' Committee                        |
| PUS            | Permanent undersecretary                                    |
| RAF            | Royal Air Force                                             |
| RIIA           | Royal Institute of International Affairs                    |

|                |                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>RIS</i>     | <i>Review of International Studies</i>   |
| RN             | Royal Navy                               |
| <i>RR</i>      | <i>Russian Review</i>                    |
| SAC            | Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee   |
| SD             | Southern Department, FO                  |
| <i>SEER</i>    | <i>Slavonic and East European Review</i> |
| SIS            | Secret Intelligence Service              |
| <i>SR</i>      | <i>Slavic Review</i>                     |
| <i>SS</i>      | <i>Soviet Studies</i>                    |
| <i>SU/US</i>   | <i>Soviet Union/Union Soviétique</i>     |
| T              | Treasury                                 |
| <i>TCBH</i>    | <i>Twentieth Century British History</i> |
| tel            | telegram                                 |
| <i>W&amp;S</i> | <i>War and Society</i>                   |
| <i>WH</i>      | <i>War in History</i>                    |
| WO             | War Office                               |

# Introduction

---

Contrary to Sellar and Yeatman's famous concluding quip in *1066 and All That*, the end of the Great War did not mean that 'History came to a full.'<sup>1</sup> Given that Great Britain was a sated Power even before 1914, this was perhaps unfortunate, for any change to the *status quo* was likely to threaten Britain's global position. To deal with this, British policy makers in the inter-war period concerned themselves with maintaining the settlements reached in the years from 1919 to 1923 and ensuring that any changes to policy were achieved by negotiation rather than by force. However, British policy experienced a failure of great expectations, and war broke out again a generation later. This study is an attempt to explain why this failure happened.

The method employed here is to make a detailed examination of Britain's policy towards Soviet Russia in the period from 1919 to 1939. This approach needs clarification and amplification. This book is designed to do two things. First, it aims to fill a gap in the existing literature concerning Britain's relations with Soviet Russia.<sup>2</sup> However, it is intended to be more than that, for if it dealt with only purely Anglo-Soviet matters it would be a thin text. One of the significant points about relations between London and Moscow in the inter-war period is that they were so limited. An analysis dealing only with Anglo-Soviet relations narrowly defined would largely be a study in silence, punctuated by the raucous outbursts surrounding such incidents as the Zinoviev letter, the Arcos raid, the Metro-Vickers affair, Munich and the Anglo-Soviet negotiations of 1939.

Such an approach would fail to see the significance of Anglo-Soviet relations in their larger context. Thus, the second goal of this book is to

<sup>1</sup> W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London, 1930), 115.

<sup>2</sup> General studies include W. P. and Z. K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1943); F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism. The Impact of a Revolution* (London, 1982); and Sir Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (new edn, Basingstoke and London, 2000).

show how Soviet Russia affected British strategic foreign-policy making generally. Thus, it provides a new perspective on and explanation of London's policy in the inter-war period. It also determines just what matters are dealt with in this study. Soviet Russia was important not just for what it did with respect to Britain, but also for what it did in international relations generally. As the major threats to British interests came from Germany and Japan, how Soviet Russia affected Anglo-Japanese and Anglo-German relations is of central importance.

There are a number of reasons for proceeding in this fashion. One derives from the general observation that to look comprehensively in detail at British strategic foreign policy in the inter-war period is daunting, if not impossible. The topic's sprawling nature makes any exhaustive attempt at analysis difficult.<sup>3</sup> To get round this obstacle, this book drills an Anglo-Soviet 'bore-hole' into the sediment of British strategic foreign policy in order to obtain a 'core-sample' that will reveal much about the entire topic. Thus, Anglo-Soviet affairs provide the organizing theme for the larger topic. In this way, a clear focus can be provided for a look at the larger subject.

The choice of which 'core-sample' to look at is arbitrary, but not entirely whimsical. Soviet Russia affected British policy in unique and valuable ways. The first obtains from geography. Britain and Soviet Russia were the final barriers against any German attempt to establish hegemony on the continent. The degree of collaboration between them in the inter-war period played a major role in European stability just as it had in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> But Britain and Soviet Russia both also had growing extra-European concerns. In the Far East, both states faced imperial Japan. The fact that Britain and Soviet Russia were each threatened by German and Japanese aggrandizement means that an examination of Anglo-Soviet matters enables us to see British policy in

<sup>3</sup> This is not to disparage some very good studies, only to indicate the problems involved. See W. N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 1919–1963* (London, 1968); C. J. Barlett, *British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1989); Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy 1919–1939* (Manchester, 1998); David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991); and Andrew J. Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War* (Oxford, 1997). Useful specific studies are Anne Orde, *Great Britain and International Security 1920–1926* (London, 1978), G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy During the Curzon Period, 1919–1924* (London, 1995), Richard S. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe. British Foreign Policy 1924–1929* (London and Portland, OR, 1997), and Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War 1938–1939* (London, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> See Paul Schroeder, 'The Nineteenth Century System: Balance of Power or Political Equilibrium?', *RIS*, 15 (1989), 135–53, and his 'Did the Vienna System Rest upon a Balance of Power?', *AHR*, 97 (1992), 683–706.

its broader, global context and to avoid the narrower focus imposed by considering it only in either its European or its East Asian context. Such an approach necessarily makes a consideration of British imperial defence, and how Soviet Russia affected it, one of the central themes of this study.

The Anglo-Soviet 'core-sample' is also a useful means of assaying the impact of ideology on British policy. The inter-war period was a time of ideological tension.<sup>5</sup> For many, the First World War had proved the bankruptcy of the existing international order, and even those regimes that were not overthrown as a result of the conflict itself found themselves challenged domestically by the dynamic revolutionary creeds that emerged after 1917.<sup>6</sup> Communism (or Bolshevism as it was generally termed), fascism and Naziism all asserted that they were the future and that liberal democracy was shopworn.

Of the three revolutionary ideologies, Bolshevism had the greatest impact on Britain and British strategic foreign policy. Naziism was too racist and too German to have much domestic appeal in Britain.<sup>7</sup> Fascism had more, but it never attracted more than a tiny minority of Britons.<sup>8</sup> Communism was a different matter. Its tenets, if not its practice, were universalist. This meant that it could act (or could be perceived as acting) as a revolutionary force domestically in Britain.<sup>9</sup> At least as importantly, Lenin's concept of imperialism as the highest stage

<sup>5</sup> Alan Cassels, *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World* (London and New York, 1996), 139–80; Cassels, 'Ideology', in Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Origins of World War II. The Debate Continues* (Basingstoke and New York, 2003), 227–48; and Michael Howard, 'Ideology and International Relations', *RIS*, 15 (1989), 1–10.

<sup>6</sup> Generally, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society. The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890–1930* (New York, 1958), 392–431, and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto and New York, 1989). For the pre-1914 background, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Space and Time 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> N. J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism. The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935–1940* (London and New York, 1997), which also introduces the literature.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview, see Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–1939. Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester and New York, 2000). For specific aspects, see G. C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the BUF', *JCH*, 19, 4 (1984); Richard C. Thurlow, 'British Fascism and State Surveillance, 1934–1935', *INS*, 3, 1 (1988), 77–99; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain. A History 1918–1985* (Oxford, 1987), 122–5; Stephen Cullen, 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists', *JCH*, 22 (1987), 115–36; Cullen, 'Political Violence: The Case of the British Union of Fascists', *JCH*, 28 (1993), 245–67; and the debate between M. Pugh, 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate', *HJ*, 41 (1991), 529–42, and Jon Lawrence, 'Fascist Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Inter-war Britain: The Olympia Debate Revisited', *HR*, 76, 192 (2003), 238–67. For the FO's response, see P. G. Edwards, 'The Foreign Office and Fascism 1924–1929', *JCH*, 5, 2 (1970), 153–61.

<sup>9</sup> Discussed more fully in chapter 1.



of capitalism led the Bolsheviks, through the agency of the Communist International (the Comintern, set up in Moscow in 1919 as a co-ordinating body for ideologically pure socialists and as an arm of Soviet policy), to attempt to subvert European colonial empires.<sup>10</sup> This made Bolshevism a threat to the British Empire and a prime consideration in questions of imperial defence.<sup>11</sup> Thus, an examination of Anglo-Soviet strategic matters forces us to look at how ideology affected the formulation of British policy.<sup>12</sup> This is of interest generally and of particular significance with respect to the crucial events preceding the outbreak of the Second World War.

This is not to argue that Anglo-Soviet affairs were *the* most important bilateral relationship in British strategic foreign policy. Much stronger arguments could be made for Britain's relations with France, Germany, Japan and the United States. Anglo-Soviet issues, except in a few cases, were matters of secondary importance. However, it *is* an argument for the importance of Soviet Russia in the formulation and understanding of British strategic foreign policy in general. Soviet Russia affected more issues of significance for Britain than did any other major Power. For this reason, the study of it – the taking of its 'core-sample' – provides a more comprehensive view of British policy than does an examination of Britain's dealings with any other Power.

And there is yet another way in which Britain's relations with Soviet Russia are particularly valuable and revealing. If we place the Great Powers into two categories: those *status quo* Powers who wished to defend (or at least to manage changes to) the settlements reached at Paris in 1919 and those who wished to change them by force of arms if necessary (the so-called revisionist Powers), then Britain and France were firmly in the former category, while Germany, Italy and Japan were in the latter. But Soviet Russia is difficult to categorize. Moscow had millennialist goals, making it a revolutionary, but not necessarily a revisionist Power. This fact had repercussions. Britain could scarcely align itself with any of the revisionist Powers, unless it could persuade them to

<sup>10</sup> For the Comintern's origins, see Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley and London, 1994), 32–9.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire 1918–1922* (Manchester, 1984), 44–9; Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence. British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904–1924* (London and Portland, OR, 1995), 306–20, 324–5; Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914–1941* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 49–70; Orest Babij, 'The Making of Imperial Defence Policy in Britain, 1926–1934', unpublished DPhil. thesis, Oxford 2003, 25–66. I would like to thank Dr Babij for putting his work at my disposal.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism, and the Foreign Office, 1937–1939', *JCH*, 6, 3 (1971), 66–86.

pursue their aims peacefully.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for London, all the 'revisionists' were potential enemies, although the British were loath to see this as inevitable. On the other hand, France was a near-inevitable British ally (though the British also were reluctant to accept the military ramifications of a tightly defined Anglo-French relationship).<sup>14</sup> And France, faced with revisionist Italy and Germany, had little option but to throw its lot in with Britain.<sup>15</sup> The United States was in a similar position, although Washington had an option – isolationism – denied Paris by geography. Soviet Russia's position was ambivalent. Regarding all other states with a suspicion derived from ideology, Soviet leaders could as easily align themselves with a *status quo* Power such as France (the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935) as with a revisionist Power such as Nazi Germany (the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939). Soviet Russia itself could also be the target of the revisionist nations, something underlined by the Anti-Comintern Pact. In all circumstances, however, the security of Soviet Russia, not necessarily general peace (which, according to Marxist dogma, the inevitable crisis of capitalism made impossible), was Moscow's goal.

The ambiguity of Soviet Russia's position makes the Anglo-Soviet 'core-sample' particularly rich. Not only does it permit an examination of actual British policy, but it also allows a consideration of the different possible British policies. Could Soviet Russia be persuaded to help contain the revisionist Powers? If so, what was the price and was it worth the cost? Was Soviet Russia a potential enemy? If so, would one of the revisionist Powers have to be conceded its goals in order to prevent Britain's having to face not just three but perhaps four possible enemies? Would Moscow remain aloof from any possible conflict involving Britain in order to fish in troubled waters? These questions were entangled with British considerations of power, ideology and personality. It is not surprising that as early as 1933 the Foreign Office contended that Soviet

<sup>13</sup> See Sargent's minute, 9 Dec 1931, on 'Note as Regards Anglo-German Relations', Selby (Simon's private secretary), 6 Dec 1931: 'As regards Germany, there can of course be no question of direct and open co-operation, for any such combination would needs take the revolutionary form of a concerted attack on the *status-quo* of Europe as laid down by the Peace Treaties' (Simon Papers, FO 800/285).

<sup>14</sup> Martin S. Alexander and William J. Philpott, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1928–1939', in Martin S. Alexander, ed., *Knowing Your Friends. Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (London and Portland, OR, 1998), 53–84.

<sup>15</sup> French attempts to come to terms with Italy foundered on the conflicting goals of the two states; see William I. Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy. The Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy, 1920–1940* (Kent, OH, and London, 1988).

Russia was 'the great enigma' in the determination of British strategic foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

Soviet Russia's indeterminate position also causes some difficulties for any study of its influence on British policy. Because the British were never certain what Soviet Russia's security policy was (or even what they wanted it to be), much of what is discussed below never became policy. In fact, often it never became more than speculation among the members of the strategic foreign-policy making élite, particularly those civil servants within the Foreign Office whose job it was to provide analysis and options.<sup>17</sup> However, if the goal is to understand why certain policy options were adopted, then the devil is in the detail, and it is vital to know what other options existed and why they were rejected. It is also essential to understand just how that winnowing process worked.

This need for comprehensive detail also explains the focus on the Foreign Office. Only in exceptional cases were policy alternatives discussed on a regular basis elsewhere. The Foreign Office's central occupation was to shape British strategic foreign policy, and all information from other departments flowed through it. Therefore, it is only logical that the Foreign Office files should provide the bulk of the material in this book.<sup>18</sup> Nor should it be surprising that many lesser-known figures in the Foreign Office have been allowed to speak for themselves rather than have their ideas paraphrased. Only by working in this fashion can the complexity and the personal nature of the debates over policy alternatives become clear. However, the Foreign Office was not the only voice in the discussion of policy. Thus, as the use of the term 'strategic foreign policy' suggests, the influence of other departments, particularly of the Treasury and the fighting services, is a central part of what follows.<sup>19</sup>

The intended end result of this consideration of the Anglo-Soviet 'core-sample' is to revise the existing explanatory frameworks for British strategic foreign policy in the inter-war period. Analysis of this subject has centred around the concept of appeasement.<sup>20</sup> Soviet Russia is central in

<sup>16</sup> 'Memorandum respecting Manchukuo', DRC 20, W. R. Connor Green (FED, FO), 21 Nov 1933, Cab 16/109.

<sup>17</sup> For the concept, see D. C. Watt, 'The Nature of the Foreign-Policy Making Elite in Britain', in D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Politics. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London and South Bend, IN, 1965), 1–15.

<sup>18</sup> Best, *British Intelligence*, 5–10. His remarks on intelligence apply generally.

<sup>19</sup> The term 'strategic foreign policy' encompasses more than what is usually meant by foreign policy. It involves the state's utilization of all the means – economic, financial, military, naval and traditional diplomatic – at its disposal to influence international relations; see John Robert Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy. The Evolution of British Strategic Foreign Policy, 1919–1926* (Ithaca, 1989), 179–89.

<sup>20</sup> My discussion is informed by D. C. Watt, 'Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?', *PQ*, 36, 2 (1965), 191–213; Watt, 'The Historiography of Appeasement', in

this argument. Those who have accepted the appeasement model have blamed the British for not recognizing that Germany was a rogue state that could be resisted only by means of force or by the threat of force.<sup>21</sup> And, it is often contended, force, or the threat of force, could best have been provided by means of an Anglo-Soviet alliance. From this it is concluded that the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe was the fault of British decision makers – the ‘guilty men’ – who refused to countenance a Soviet alliance due to their inherent, broadly defined ideological prejudices.<sup>22</sup>

Appeasement as an explanation for the coming of war has not remained unchallenged. In the late 1970s, a new, revisionist school of thinking emerged. These accounts argued that appeasement was a reasoned response to the ‘realities behind diplomacy’.<sup>23</sup> Closely tied to this revisionist view of appeasement is ‘declinism’, the larger thesis of Britain’s putative decline as a Great Power in the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> In it, appeasement is subsumed in a grand vision of Britain’s rise and fall, and becomes a subset of the failure by successive British leaders to recognize Britain’s diminished capability to shape world events.

Appeasement and ‘declinism’ have their attractions. Appeasement, with its ‘guilty men’ and ‘anti-appeasers’, makes for a dramatic narrative,

A. Sked and C. Cook, eds., *Crisis and Controversy. Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1976), 110–29; Stephen G. Walker, ‘Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy During the 1930s’, *BJIS*, 6 (1980), 219–46; Paul Kennedy, ‘Appeasement’, in Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. The A. J. P. Taylor Debate After Twenty-Five Years* (London, 1986), 140–61; David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 2001), 70–187; and Patrick Finney, ‘The Romance of Decline: The Historiography of Appeasement and British National Identity’, *eJH* (June, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Appeasement has been primarily used as an explanatory model only for Europe, but see Aron Shai, ‘Was There a Far Eastern Munich?’, *JCH*, 9, 3 (1974), 161–70.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Jabara Carley, 1939. *The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), and Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union 1937–1939* (London and Portland, OR, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> The phrase is from Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy* (London, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> For the ‘decline’ school, see Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London, 1972); Barnett, *The Audit of War. The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, 1986); Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share. A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1970* (London, 1975); Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power. Modern Britain 1870–1975* (London, 1983); and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987); but cf. Gordon Martel, ‘The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain’, John R. Ferris, ‘“The Greatest Power on Earth”: Great Britain in the 1920s’, and B. J. C. McKercher, ‘“Our Most Dangerous Enemy”: Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s’, all in *IHR*, 13, 4 (1991), 662–94, 726–50 and 751–83 respectively. For ‘declinism’ as an intellectual phenomenon, see Richard English and Michael Kenny, ‘Public Intellectuals and the Question of British Decline’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3, 3 (2001), 259–83.

complete with villains and heroes.<sup>25</sup> In this chiaroscuro world, policy choices were stark and the moral choices Manichaeian. ‘Declinism’ offers another intriguing story line. The Olympian perspective of the *longue durée* provides the reader with a sense of sombre grandeur, as the rise and fall of British power is played out by characters who are only dimly aware of their circumstances.

These approaches also have their limitations. ‘Declinism’ and revisionist views of appeasement are based largely on economic determinism, and fail to consider the wider aspects of power.<sup>26</sup> The arguments based upon appeasement and ‘guilty men’ illustrate the dangers inherent in the principle of the excluded middle. In both cases, their basic assumptions exclude many possibilities. For the ‘declinists’, discussions of alternative policies are feckless, as impersonal forces have already determined the outcome. For the ‘guilty men/appeasement’ school, there are only two choices to be made: one right, the other wrong. An examination of the Anglo-Soviet ‘core-sample’ makes it evident that both of these approaches are simplistic and inadequate.

Looking at Anglo-Soviet matters shows that Britain did not face predetermined outcomes but rather choice.<sup>27</sup> British power, while not irresistible, was sufficient to permit alternative policies. Discovering what these alternatives were and why they were not followed requires looking at a wider range of factors than the appeasement school or the declinist school consider. Only by looking at some of the fundamental matters that affected the formulation of British strategic foreign policy can a deeper understanding of it be obtained. To do so requires a consideration of the legacies of the First World War.<sup>28</sup>

These legacies will be considered under two headings: structural (including systemic) and intellectual. With regard to structural and systemic changes, it is essential to remember that the First World War brought about a fundamental change in the political make-up of Europe and the world.<sup>29</sup> Four empires had collapsed. Further, extra-European

<sup>25</sup> Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers. Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> The best analysis is David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York, 1991), 5–37.

<sup>27</sup> This belief is shared by the ‘post-revisionists’; see Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, 182–5. The key work is R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993), but see also S. Aster, ‘“Guilty Men”’: The Case of Neville Chamberlain’, in R. Boyce and E. M. Robertson, eds., *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1989), 233–68.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Howard, ‘The Legacy of the First World War’, in Boyce and Robertson, *Paths to War*, 33–54, also discusses this concept.

<sup>29</sup> Systemic is used in the fashion of Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994), xi–xiii. I accept his need to consider systems-level

Powers, primarily the United States and Japan, moved on to the world stage. These two occurrences had profound implications. European politics (and, given the overwhelming strength of Europe, world politics) had been dominated by a balance of power before 1914.<sup>30</sup> Britain's geographic location and the strength of the Royal Navy had allowed the country the luxury of participating in the balance largely as it suited. While isolation, 'splendid' or otherwise, had never been Britain's policy, it had been largely free to choose on to which side of the balance it would throw its weight.<sup>31</sup> After 1918, the European balance was shattered. While France and Germany, the latter at least potentially, remained as Great Powers, Austria-Hungary had devolved into a series of weak successor states, and imperial Russia had been replaced by Soviet Russia, a country unwilling to participate in (and a threat to) the existing order. This meant that the pre-war balance of power no longer functioned and that British strategic foreign policy would have to be formulated on a different, as yet undetermined basis.

This problem was intensified by the growth of American and Japanese power. Even before the First World War, the United States' potential power was evident to many. The Venezuelan crisis and the Alaska boundary settlement made this evident; the British had decided that the Monroe Doctrine would not be challenged and Canada could not be defended.<sup>32</sup> The case of Japan was more complex. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 had been concluded to utilize Tokyo to stem St Petersburg's expansion in the Far East.<sup>33</sup> This proved to be a double-edged sword. The Russo-Japanese War eliminated Russia as a threat to British interests in the Far East, but it also removed St Petersburg as

analysis, but do not wish to enter into the debate as to which 'system' is correct. For this, see Jack S. Levy, 'The Theoretical Foundations of Paul W. Schroeder's International System', *IHR*, 16, 4 (1994), 715–45. For a sceptical view, see Edward Ingram, 'The Wonderland of the Political Scientist', *International Security*, 22, 1 (1997), 53–63.

<sup>30</sup> For an introduction, see T. G. Otte, '“Almost a Law of Nature”?: Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Office, and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1905–1912', *D&S*, 14, 2 (2003), 77–118.

<sup>31</sup> C. H. D. Howard, *Splendid Isolation. A Study of Ideas Concerning Britain's International Position and Foreign Policy During the Later Years of the Third Marquis of Salisbury* (London, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> Charles S. Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898–1903* (Baltimore, 1957); A. E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States 1895–1903* (London, 1960); and Samuel F. Wells, Jr, 'British Strategic Withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere, 1904–1906', and Peter Neary, 'Grey, Bryce, and the Settlement of Canadian–American Differences, 1905–1911', both in *CHR*, 49, 4 (1968), 335–56 and 357–80 respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Keith Neilson, 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and British Strategic Foreign Policy 1902–1914', in Phillips Payson O'Brien, ed., *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance* (London and New York, 2004), 48–63.

a check to Tokyo's aspirations. This new reality was reinforced by the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>34</sup>

The systemic significance of the growth of both American and Japanese power for British strategic foreign policy came from the fact that both countries lay outside the European balance of power. Great Power politics now had both a global and a European context, and Britain had either to defend its extra-European interests by itself or to persuade another Power to assist it.<sup>35</sup> The two possible assistants were the United States and Soviet Russia.<sup>36</sup> Of the two, the United States was the agent of choice. Washington and London were thought to be kindred spirits, at worst vying with one another in 'competitive cooperation' rather than being engaged, as were Moscow and London, in an early version of a 'clash of civilizations'.<sup>37</sup> In the British new world order, Soviet Russia thus could play a number of roles. As a revolutionary power, it could reject taking a role favourable to Britain in an extended, global balance of power and pursue policies designed to subvert Britain and the empire. Or it could decide to set aside its revolutionary aspirations temporarily and, for *raisons d'état*, combine with Japan to oust Britain from the Far East. As easily, in the face of an aggressive and ambitious Japan, Moscow could decide to become London's strategic bedfellow. Soviet Russia had a similar set of options in Europe. It could either assist in containing a resurgent Germany or join with it to redraw the map of Europe. Finally, it could retreat into isolation, and await the inevitable collapse of capitalism. In each case, what Soviet Russia decided would be an important factor for British planners.

If this was the systemic impact of the war itself, what was the legacy of the peace settlement? Outside the territorial settlements themselves, the primary innovation at Versailles was the creation of the League of Nations.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Keith Neilson, 'Unbroken Thread: Japan and Britain and Imperial Defence, 1920–1932', in Greg Kennedy, ed., *British Naval Strategy East of Suez, 1900–2000. Influences and Actions* (London and Portland, OR, 2005), 62–89.

<sup>35</sup> This state of affairs had also occurred earlier; see Thomas Otte, '“Heaven Knows where we shall finally drift”: Lord Salisbury, the Cabinet, Isolation and the Boxer Rebellion', in Gregory C. Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., *Incidents and International Relations* (Westport, CT, 2002), 25–46; Otte, 'A Question of Leadership: Lord Salisbury, the Unionist Cabinet and Foreign Policy Making, 1895–1900', *CBH*, 14, 4 (2000), 1–26.

<sup>36</sup> The point is made for the Far East by Kennedy in his *Anglo-American Strategic Relations*, 51–90.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Hogan, *Informal Entente. The Private Structure of Cooperation of Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy 1918–1928* (Columbia, MO, 1978); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> What follows is informed by Zara Steiner, 'The League of Nations and the Quest for Security', in R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke, and M. Howard, eds., *The Quest for Stability*.



From its inception, the League experienced a number of difficulties. One such problem was an uncertainty as to its function.<sup>39</sup> The League suffered from a mixed parentage, with some – the ‘utopians’, ‘idealists’, ‘liberal internationalists’ or ‘Wilsonians’ – seeing it as a means of maintaining peace through guarantees and sanctions.<sup>40</sup> Others, the ‘realists’ (or ‘conservative internationalists’) preferred a League that would provide a consultative mechanism designed to ensure what would essentially be an Anglo-American condominium to maintain a stable world order.<sup>41</sup>

The League’s existence had several phases. In the 1920s, it was successful in mediating several border disputes between smaller Powers and in providing a forum for disarmament discussions. In the 1930s, its successes were minimal. By 1934, disarmament was a failure. And, when quarrels arose involving Great Powers, the League proved unable to find a solution.<sup>42</sup> Part of this was due to the structure of the League itself.

*Problems of West European Security 1918–1957* (Oxford, 1993), 36–70, and J. P. Dunbabin, ‘The League of Nations’ Place in the International System’, *History*, 78, 254 (1993), 421–42.

<sup>39</sup> George Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations. Strategy, Politics and International Organization, 1914–1919* (London, 1979); Egerton, ‘Collective Security as Political Myth: Liberal Internationalism and the League of Nations in Politics and History’, *IHR*, 5, 4 (1983), 496–524; Egerton, ‘Ideology, Diplomacy and International Organisations: Wilsonism and the League of Nations in Anglo-American Relations, 1918–1920’, in B. J. C. McKercher, ed., *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s. The Struggle for Supremacy* (London, 1991), 17–54; Egerton, ‘Conservative Internationalism: British Approaches to International Organization and the Creation of the League of Nations’, *D&S*, 5, 1 (1994), 1–20. For a contrary view, see Peter J. Yearwood, ‘“On the Safe and Right Lines”: The Lloyd George Government and the Origins of the League of Nations’, *HJ*, 32, 1 (1989), 131–55, and Yearwood, ‘“Real Securities against New Wars”: Official British Thinking and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1914–1919’, *D&S*, 9, 3 (1998), 83–109. Important is Ruth Henig, ‘New Diplomacy and Old: A Reassessment of British Conceptions of a League of Nations’, in Michael Dockrill and John Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Peace Without Victory?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), 157–74.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Utopians’ is from E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, 1939); the other terms are the product of subsequent academic analysis. For discussions, see Peter Wilson, ‘Introduction: *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* and the Category of “Idealism” in International Relations’, and David Long, ‘Conclusion: Inter-War “Idealism”, Liberal Internationalism and Contemporary International Theory’, both in David Long and Peter Wilson, eds., *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis. Inter-War Idealism Reassessed* (Oxford, 1995), 1–24 and 302–28 respectively, and Richard S. Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement* (London and Portland, OR, 2001), 1–27. For deeper roots, see F. R. Flournoy, ‘British Liberal Theories of International Relations, 1848–1896’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 7, 2 (1946), 195–217, and David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition. Socialists, Liberals, and the Quest for Unity, 1884–1939* (Cambridge, 1992), 25–146.

<sup>41</sup> Priscilla Roberts, ‘Lord Lothian and the Atlantic World’, *Historian*, 66, 1 (2004), 97–127.

<sup>42</sup> Peter J. Beck, ‘Britain and Appeasement in the Late 1930s: Was There a League of Nations’ Alternative?’, in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone, eds., *Decisions and*



The League's Covenant ostensibly provided a framework for joint action dealing with all international disputes, but the articles of the Covenant that provided for what became known as 'collective security' were not binding. Nor were they necessarily backed up by force, since the League's Council could only 'recommend' to its members what force should be used should sanctions fail.<sup>43</sup> And there was a fundamental dichotomy between simultaneously advocating disarmament and expecting member states to provide the force required to make collective security effective.<sup>44</sup> By the 1930s, many believed (or preferred to believe) that international public opinion would act as the League's ultimate weapon. Such a belief cut no ice with Soviet Russia, whose idea of collective security always involved force.

Another weakness of the League was the extent of its membership. Germany was excluded at first, not being allowed to join until 1926. The United States was one of the intellectual founders of the League, but the American Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles kept Washington outside Geneva. And Soviet Russia viewed the entire League with suspicion, seeing it as innately hostile to the Bolshevik experiment. Indeed, the Comintern was founded in part to act as an alternative to the League. Without the membership of key players, the League could provide only a feeble substitute for the pre-1914 balance of power. However, the emotional and political capital invested in the concept of the League meant that any international undertakings had to be (or appear to be) compatible with the League. This led to difficulties. One of these was notable after Soviet Russia joined the League in 1934. The Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, Maxim Litvinov, interpreted collective security in a fashion difficult to distinguish from pre-1914 Concert diplomacy. This complicated Anglo-Soviet relations, as many Britons no longer accepted that nineteenth-century approach.

While the League provided a new framework, there was another means of dealing with international relations that gained wide acceptance. This was the idea of mutual guarantees that found its initial expression in the Locarno Treaties of 1925.<sup>45</sup> Negotiated in an attempt to

*Diplomacy. Essays in Twentieth-Century International History* (London and New York, 1995), 153–73.

<sup>43</sup> F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace. Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (Cambridge, 1963), 309–22.

<sup>44</sup> Maurice Vaisse, 'Security and Disarmament: Problems in the Development of the Disarmament Debates 1919–1934', and Philip Towle, 'British Security and Disarmament Policy in Europe in the 1920s', both in Ahmann, Birke and Howard, *Quest for Stability*, 173–200 and 127–53 respectively.

<sup>45</sup> Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy. Germany and the West, 1925–1929* (Princeton, 1972), and Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain*, 44–75. For recent reappraisals of Chamberlain's

ensure France's security while at the same time treating Germany as an equal, the Locarno Treaties, despite their extra-League qualities, were seen as compatible with the spirit of Geneva.<sup>46</sup> Hence, Locarno generated a series of bilateral pacts. British policy makers spent a good deal of time in the 1930s trying to manufacture such things as an 'Eastern Locarno' and a 'Mediterranean Locarno'.<sup>47</sup> But, Locarno also acted as a constraint on British policy makers. With bows needing to be made in the direction of either the League Covenant or Locarno (or both), the room for diplomatic manoeuvre was slight. Negotiations with Soviet Russia in the 1930s often found themselves hindered by such restraints.

The Great War also left major intellectual legacies. Some of these involved Soviet Russia directly, others did not. They need to be discussed, however, as they impinged upon all inter-war thinking. One important issue was the disputation about the origins of the conflict itself. There were various strands in this debate: the impact of arms races, the pernicious influence of 'old diplomacy', the effect of entangling alliances and the problems presented by submerged nationalities. For many people after the war, it was a truism that arms races, evil in themselves, caused war.<sup>48</sup> So powerful was this argument that disarmament was made part and parcel of the Treaty of Versailles, and the British concept of international relations in the inter-war period was suffused with a concern to avoid arms races, with their attendant 'merchants of death', lest they lead to war.<sup>49</sup>

Another explanation for the origin of the war centred around the linked concepts of 'old diplomacy', secret alliances and the balance of

policy, see Gaynor Johnson, 'Lord D'Abernon, Austen Chamberlain and the Origin of the Treaty of Locarno', *ejlH* (2000), and cf. Richard Grayson, 'Austen Chamberlain', in T. G. Otte, ed., *The Makers of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 150–72, and B. J. C. McKercher, 'Austen Chamberlain and the Continental Balance of Power: Strategy, Stability, and the League of Nations, 1924–1929', *D&S*, 14, 2 (2003), 207–36.

<sup>46</sup> For the linkage, see Joseph Charles Heim, 'Liberalism and the Establishment of Collective Security in British Foreign Policy', *TRHS*, 6th series, 5 (1995), 91–110.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Gábor Bátonyi, *Britain and Central Europe 1918–1933* (Oxford, 1999), 61–70.

<sup>48</sup> Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference* (Basingstoke and New York, 2003), 7–11, summarizes the arguments; for analysis, see David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War. Europe 1904–1914* (Oxford, 1996), 1–15, 412–21. Important is Patrick Kyba, *Covenants Without the Sword. Public Opinion and British Defence Policy 1931–1935* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> David G. Anderson, 'British Rearmament and the "Merchants of Death": The 1935–1936 Royal Commission on the Manufacture of and Trade in Armaments', *JCH*, 29 (1994), 5–37.

power.<sup>50</sup> In this view, it was the pre-1914 secret treaties between the various Powers, with their interlocking obligations, that had transformed a local Balkan conflict into a European catastrophe. In the emotive British variant, it was argued that the unfortunate Entente with France had led to the flower of British youth dying on the battlefields of Flanders and that Britain had gone to war to defend autocratic Russia. There was another strand: the alleged undemocratic way in which these treaties had been concluded. Pressure groups such as the Union of Democratic Control railed that the Foreign Office, a bastion of aristocratic privilege, had committed Britain to war behind the back of Parliament and the people.<sup>51</sup> All of this could be avoided, liberal internationalists contended, by the innovation provided by the League, and, as Woodrow Wilson put it, by 'open covenants openly arrived at'. Thus, in the inter-war period certain kinds of policies were proscribed; as a British diplomatist put it: 'alliances were out of fashion'.<sup>52</sup> Action taken in the context of the League or of a Locarno-like agreement was acceptable; anything that smacked of 'secret' diplomacy was not.

Closely aligned was the intellectual attack on the balance of power. The term indeed is a slippery one, but it was generally used pejoratively to refer to a reliance on considerations of power to maintain the *status quo*.<sup>53</sup> As such, it cut across all notions of collective security, reliance on the League and, implicitly, the idea of disarmament. Thus, the balance of power was lumped in with other pre-war notions that had to be discarded in the new world order.

If the First World War had been caused by such things as secret diplomacy, arms races and a reliance on the balance of power, then why was Germany's war-guilt enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles?<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> On 'old diplomacy', see Henig, 'New Diplomacy and Old'.

<sup>51</sup> Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford, 1971). Criticism led to post-war reform; see Zara Steiner and M. L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919–1921', *HJ*, 17, 1 (1974), 131–56. For a contemporary academic opinion, see Robert T. Nightingale, 'The Personnel of the British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service, 1851–1929', *American Political Science Review*, 24, 2 (1930), 331.

<sup>52</sup> Sir John Tilley, *London to Tokyo* (London, 1942), 194.

<sup>53</sup> For the problems of definition, see Martin Wight, 'The Balance of Power', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations. Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London, 1966), 149–75. For an approach to the topic of the balance of power in the inter-war period, see M. L. Roi and B. J. C. McKercher, '“Ideal” and “Punch-Bag”: Conflicting Views of the Balance of Power and Their Influence on Inter-war British Foreign Policy', *D&S*, 12, 2 (2001), 47–78.

<sup>54</sup> Two recent collections are valuable: Michael Dockrill and John Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Peace Without Victory?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), particularly, Zara Steiner, 'The Treaty of Versailles Revisited', 13–34, and Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles. A*

And, if Versailles was a *Diktat* or victors' peace, what legitimacy did the treaty possess and how could it act as the basis on which to build a lasting new order? The attacks on its legitimacy began soon after the ink was dry, and the assault continued throughout the inter-war period. The Germans, playing on both the emerging historical consensus that the war was caused by impersonal forces and a strong moral and religious argument that the peace was flawed, called for revisions to the settlement.<sup>55</sup> With the use of force sidelined as un-Leaguely and likely to cause another war, and with the revisionist Powers being seen as having legitimate grievances, British policy makers found themselves in the midst of a 'twenty years' crisis'.<sup>56</sup> Policy choices were tightly circumscribed, not only by the physical, economic and financial 'realities behind diplomacy', but also by mental constraints. It was the debate over these mental constraints – as much as discussions of military weakness or decline – that was at the intellectual heart of all British strategic foreign policy in the period from 1919 to 1939. In that sense, then, this is a study of competing *mentalités*, an effort to determine what were the 'mental maps' of the foreign-policy making élite and how they affected policy.<sup>57</sup>

A consideration of mental maps leads into a discussion of who made policy. Before such a discussion can begin, it is necessary to remember that there was yet another legacy of the First World War: a 'transformation' of British government.<sup>58</sup> One aspect was that the pre-1914

*Reassessment After 75 Years* (Washington and Cambridge, 1998), particularly Michael Graham Fry, 'British Revisionism', 565–602, and Gordon Martel, 'A Comment', 615–36.

<sup>55</sup> Catherine Ann Cline, 'British Historians and the Treaty of Versailles', *Albion*, 20, 1 (1988), 43–58; Cline, 'Ecumenism and Appeasement: The Bishops of the Church of England and the Treaty of Versailles', *JMH*, 61, 4 (1989), 683–703, and Gordon Martel, 'The Prehistory of Appeasement: Headlam-Morley, the Peace Settlement and Revisionism', *D&S*, 9, 3 (1998), 242–65.

<sup>56</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, drew attention to the tendency of policy makers to ignore power in international relations. Carr omitted to mention that his own intellectual activities helped to undermine the existing order; see Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity. E. H. Carr 1892–1982* (London, 1999), 41–80.

<sup>57</sup> For *mentalités*, see Patrick H. Hutton, 'The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History', *History and Theory*, 20 (1981), 237–59. For 'mental maps', see Zara Steiner, 'Elitism and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Office Before the Great War', in B. J. C. McKercher and David J. Moss, eds., *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895–1939. Memorial Essays Honouring C. J. Lowe* (Edmonton, Alberta, 1984), 19–56, and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995), xi–xii, 3–109. For the underlying concept, see Alan K. Hendrickson, 'The Geographical "Mental Maps" of American Foreign Policy Makers', *International Political Science Review*, 1, 4 (1980); Steiner makes apposite comments in 'On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More', *IA*, 73 (1997), 531–46.

<sup>58</sup> Developed in Kathleen Burk, ed., *War and the State. The Transformation of British Government, 1914–1919* (London, 1982).

primacy of the Foreign Office in making foreign policy, under fire during the war itself, was also challenged by other departments during the inter-war period.<sup>59</sup> Of particular importance was the increase in the remit of the Treasury.<sup>60</sup> Both during and after the war, the complicated negotiations concerning loans, war debts and reparations immersed the Treasury in relations with other states. Further, the fact that all spending programmes had to go to the Treasury before they could be considered by Cabinet also led to friction. The Treasury would often make suggestions about foreign policy in an attempt to limit the amounts of spending that the fighting services deemed necessary. Either event could result in disputes between the Treasury and the Foreign Office over which was to be the final arbiter of British strategic foreign policy.<sup>61</sup>

There were other changes to the policy-making structure. Two concerned foreign trade. Before 1914, the Commercial Department of the Foreign Office dealt with such matters, but during the war a Contraband Department (which grew into the Ministry of Blockade) took over the work.<sup>62</sup> In 1917, the department of Overseas Trade (DOT), run jointly by the Foreign Office and Board of Trade, was created to offer assistance to British traders. This new department blurred the distinction between foreign and domestic policy, and, like the Treasury, intruded into the

<sup>59</sup> Roberta M. Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916–1918', *HJ*, 15, 1 (1972), 133–59; Alan Sharp, 'The Foreign Office in Eclipse, 1919–1922', *History*, 61, 202 (1976), 198–218. For reappraisals, see G. H. Bennett, 'Lloyd George, Curzon and the Control of British Foreign Policy 1919–1922', *AJPH*, 45, 4 (1999), 467–82, and Gaynor Johnson, 'Curzon, Lloyd George and the Control of British Foreign Policy, 1919–1922: A Reassessment', *D&S*, 11, 3 (2000), 49–71. The inter-war context is in David Dilks, 'The British Foreign Office Between the Wars', in McKercher and Moss, *Shadow and Substance*, 181–202; Valerie Cromwell and Zara Steiner, 'Reform and Retrenchment: The Foreign Office Between the Wars', in Roger Bullen, ed., *The Foreign Office 1782–1982* (Frederick, MD, 1984), 85–106; and B. J. C. McKercher, 'Old Diplomacy and New: The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919–1939', in Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher, eds., *Diplomacy and World Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890–1950* (Cambridge, 1996), 79–114.

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Burk, 'The Treasury: From Impotence to Power', in Burk, *War and the State*, 84–107, and George Peden, *The Treasury and British Public Policy 1906–1959* (Oxford, 2000), 73–199.

<sup>61</sup> Generally, see Peter Neville, 'Lord Vansittart, Sir Walford Selby and the Debate About Treasury Interference in the Conduct of British Foreign Policy in the 1930s', *JCH*, 36, 4 (2001), 623–33. For the views of two participants, see Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, 'Thoughts on the Foreign Office: 1918–1939', *Contemporary Review*, 138 (1955), 374–8, and Sir Walford Selby, *Diplomatic Twilight 1930–1940* (London, 1953), 4, 6, 10–11, 184.

<sup>62</sup> D. C. M. Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815–1914* (Oxford, 1968), 378–80, 393–5; Zara Steiner, 'The Foreign Office and the War', in F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, 1977), 516–31; D. N. Collins, *Aspects of British Politics, 1904–1919* (Oxford, 1965), 257–62;

former arena. In 1931, the Foreign Office attempted to take much of this activity back into its own hands by forming an Economic Relations Section, but this body proved ineffectual.<sup>63</sup> The fact remained, however, that when trade (with all its domestic implications) crossed into international affairs, the Foreign Office's voice was not the only one that spoke on policy, something that emerged strongly, for example, in the debates over Anglo-Soviet trade talks of the early 1930s.<sup>64</sup>

Other new voices also were heard. The attacks on 'secret diplomacy' were mingled with cries for the greater democratization of the making of foreign policy. One of the results was the creation of extra-governmental organizations that both commented on official foreign policy and often advocated alternative courses. The most influential of these was the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), often referred to as Chatham House, established in 1920 to provide the public with informed knowledge of international relations.<sup>65</sup> With its many ties to the official policy makers, Chatham House was active and influential in the formation of policy in the inter-war period.<sup>66</sup> So, too, were less official bodies, including the League of Nations Union (LNU) and the various peace groups that proliferated in the inter-war period.<sup>67</sup> The LNU, with Lord Robert Cecil as its president and Gilbert Murray as its chairman, was particularly vocal, creating a wide basis of support for the

Ephraim Maisel, 'The Formation of the Department of Overseas Trade, 1919–1926', *JCH*, 24 (1989), 169–90.

<sup>63</sup> Donald Graeme Boadle, 'The Formation of the Foreign Office Economic Relations Section, 1930–1937', *HJ*, 30, 4 (1977), 919–36.

<sup>64</sup> Keith Neilson, 'A Cautionary Tale: The Metro-Vickers Incident of 1933', in Gregory C. Kennedy and Neilson, *Incidents and International Relations*, 87–112.

<sup>65</sup> M. L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office and the Proposed Institute of International Affairs 1919', *IA*, 56, 4 (1980), 665–72.

<sup>66</sup> Andrea Bosco and Cornelia Navari, eds., *Chatham House and British Foreign Policy 1919–1945. The Royal Institute of International Affairs During the Inter-war Period* (London, 1994), particularly Gordon Martel, 'From Round Table to New Europe: Some Intellectual Origins of the Institute of International Affairs', 13–39; see also Inderjeet Parmar, 'Chatham House and the Anglo-American Alliance', *D&S*, 3, 1 (1992), 23–47.

<sup>67</sup> Donald S. Birn, 'The League of Nations and Collective Security', *JCH*, 9, 3 (1974), 131–60, Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918–1945* (London, 1980), and J. A. Thompson, 'Lord Cecil and the Pacifists in the League of Nations Union', *HJ*, 20, 4 (1977), 949–59. On pacifism and policy, see Martin Pugh, 'Pacifism and Politics in Britain, 1931–1935', *HJ*, 23, 3 (1980), 641–56; Keith Robbins, 'European Peace Movements and Their Influence on Policy After the First World War', in Ahmann, Birke and Howard, *Quest for Stability*, 73–86; and, most comprehensively, Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945. The Defining of a Faith* (London, 1980), and Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists. The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford, 2000), 239–375.

League, which it was politically difficult to ignore.<sup>68</sup> The devastating human losses of the First World War gave the pacifist movements more influence than had been possessed by their Victorian forbears, and ensured that any attempt to adopt a more confrontational foreign policy or to advocate rearmament had to be done with finesse. Those who made strategic foreign policy could not ignore the impact that pacifists were thought to possess at the ballot box.<sup>69</sup>

Important, too, were those individuals who helped to create an intellectual atmosphere favourable to Soviet Russia and communism. They were a disparate lot, ranging from such intellectuals as Beatrice and Sydney Webb to the stalwarts of the Socialist League and the British Communist Party, to writers such as J. B. Priestley.<sup>70</sup> A number of them travelled to Soviet Russia, where they were shown latter-day Potemkin villages, and then returned to Britain to extol the virtues of the workers' paradise. These 'fellow travellers' were not politically strong, but their influence among the educated middle classes – a group likely to vote and to influence others – meant that they had a political clout beyond their numbers.

Structural legacies of the Great War also existed in other parts of government. The problems of co-ordinating Britain's military endeavours from 1914 to 1918 gave impetus to reform.<sup>71</sup> This had begun before 1914, with the creation of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM 1866–1957* (Oxford, 1987), for an uncritical view.

<sup>69</sup> See the famous East Fulham by-election: Martin Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden, eds., *By-Elections in British Politics* (2nd edn, 1997), 49–111.

<sup>70</sup> David Cauter, *The Fellow Travellers. A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London, 1977); Sylvia Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia. The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners* (Madison, 1968); Blaazer, *Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition*, 98–192; F. M. Leventhal, 'Seeing the Future: British Left-Wing Travellers to the Soviet Union, 1919–1932', in J. M. W. Bean, ed., *The Political Culture of Modern Britain. Studies in Memory of Stephen Koss* (London, 1987), 209–27; Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'The Intellectual in Politics: The Case of the Webbs', *JCH*, 6, 3 (1971), 3–11; Ben Pimlott, 'The Socialist League: Intellectuals and the Labour Left in the 1930s', *JCH*, 6, 3 (1971), 12–39; Margot Heinemann, 'The People's Front and the Intellectuals', in Jim Fyfe, ed., *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London, 1985), 157–86; and Martin Ceadel, 'The First Communist "Peace Society": The British Anti-War Movement 1932–1935', *TCBH*, 1, 1 (1990), 58–86.

<sup>71</sup> John Sweetman, 'Towards a Ministry of Defence: First Faltering Steps, 1890–1923', in David French and Brian Holden Reid, eds., *The British General Staff. Reform and Innovation, 1890–1939* (London and Portland, OR, 2002), 26–40; William J. Philpott, 'The Campaign for a Ministry of Defence, 1919–1936', in Paul Smith, ed., *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain 1856–1990* (London and Rio Grande, 1996), 109–54.

<sup>72</sup> F. A. Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885–1959* (Oxford, 1960); Nicholas d'Ombra, *War Machinery and High Policy. Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain 1902–1914* (Oxford, 1973).



After the war, in 1923, the result was the formation of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS).<sup>73</sup> This was followed by the creation of a plethora of other military planning innovations: the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War (ATB) in 1923; the Principal Supply Officers Committee (PSOC) in 1924; the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) in 1927; and both the Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee (DCOS) and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in 1936. These military bodies, whose ambits are evident from their titles, were tied to the broader framework of strategic foreign-policy making by the fact that they all reported to the CID, whose membership included the other principal departments – the Foreign Office, the Treasury and the Board of Trade – involved. The existence of such bodies further broadened the number of those who participated in making strategic foreign policy.

So, too, did the existence of several new bodies dealing with intelligence.<sup>74</sup> In 1919, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) was created by amalgamating the War Office and Admiralty's wartime code-breaking bodies. In 1922 this new body was placed under the Foreign Office, joining the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). These two bodies continued the intelligence war against Soviet Russia that had been such a feature of Anglo-Russian relations before 1914. Until 1927, GC&CS read much of Soviet traffic; however, in the 1930s, GC&CS had no success against Soviet diplomatic codes in Europe and SIS was unable to place agents in Soviet Russia.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in this crucial decade, when knowledge of Soviet intentions would have been extremely valuable, British strategic foreign policy was largely uninformed by either signals or human intelligence about Soviet Russia.

There was a second factor that influenced how the military affected strategic foreign policy: which war and what kind of war each of the services expected to fight. Which war was shaped by the general

<sup>73</sup> H. G. Welch, 'The Origins and Development of the Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence: 1923–1939', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1973. What follows is informed by Gaines Post, Jnr, *Dilemmas of Appeasement. British Deterrence and Defense, 1934–1937* (Ithaca and London, 1993), 27–31. Post argues that such structures are inefficient.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service. The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985); Andrew, 'Secret Intelligence and British Foreign Policy 1900–1939', in Christopher Andrew and Jeremy Noakes, eds., *Intelligence and International Relations* (Exeter, 1987), 9–28; John Ferris, 'Whitehall's Black Chamber: British Cryptology and the Government Code and Cypher School, 1919–1929', *INS*, 2, 1 (1987), 54–91; Ferris, 'Before "Room 40": The British Empire and Signals Intelligence, 1898–1914', *JSS*, 12, 4 (1989), 431–57; and Ferris, 'The Road to Bletchley Park: The British Experience with Signals Intelligence, 1892–1945', *INS*, 17, 1 (2002), 53–84.

<sup>75</sup> The Soviets had much greater success against Britain; see Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB. The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London, 1990), 135–86.



international situation and Britain's place in it, but deciding what kind of war was expected was complex, an admixture of the experiences of the First World War, the advances in technology and the projections of military theorists. Projections varied from service to service. The decision was perhaps simplest for the Royal Navy (RN). The RN's long-standing need to defend Britain's interests globally did not change after the Great War. The navy continued to be the dominant arm of Britain's fighting forces after 1918. However, it was not all smooth sailing for the RN. After the First World War, the twin hammers of disarmament and fiscal restraint created new guidelines: formal equality with the United States and a 5:3:1.75:1.75 tonnage ratio between Britain, Japan, France and Italy.<sup>76</sup> The Admiralty, however, did not accept that such a formula would allow it to fulfil its global responsibilities, arguing that its needs were absolute, not relative. Thus, strategic foreign policy was constantly affected in the inter-war period by the Admiralty's battle with the Treasury.

The British army emerged from the First World War as the most powerful land force in British history. And yet, it suffered financial cuts far greater than the RN, reflecting both the historical suspicions that the British have had of standing armies and a national lack of strategic need for a large land force. However, the army still had its two traditional tasks: defending Britain's empire and facing continental foes.<sup>77</sup> These two responsibilities required both differing equipments and differing doctrines.<sup>78</sup> At a doctrinal level, the army attempted to cover all the bases by preparing for a 'war of the first magnitude' (that is, against a European Power), on the assumption that this would also be sufficient for any imperial conflict. Such preparations are exactly what were made.<sup>79</sup> But the preferred solution, an army capable of becoming an

<sup>76</sup> The Washington Naval Conference ratios of 1922. For the RN, see Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars* (2 vols; London, 1968–76), and Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (London, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> See Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment. The Dilemma for British Defence Policy in the Two World Wars* (London, 1972); G. C. Peden, 'The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered', *HJ*, 27, 2 (1984), 405–23; and Pradeep Barua, 'Strategies and Doctrines of Imperial Defence: Britain and India, 1919–1945', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25, 2 (1997), 240–66.

<sup>78</sup> Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980). My analysis is informed by David French, 'Big Wars and Small Wars Between the Wars', unpublished conference paper given at the Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Conference, Oxford, 27 March 2003. I would like to thank Professor French for making this paper available to me.

<sup>79</sup> For a recent assessment, see J. P. Harris, 'The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933–1939', in French and Holden Reid, *British General Staff*, 175–91. Of particular importance is Harris's own *Men, Ideas and Tanks. British Military Thought*

expeditionary force to the continent, cut across post-war cries of 'never again', efforts at disarmament and the personal objections of many. This divergence between responsibilities and capabilities had a marked effect on British strategic foreign policy, as it meant that continental allies, such as Soviet Russia, would be a necessity if war were to come.

The First World War was the *fons et origo* of the Royal Air Force (RAF). But, after the war, the RAF had to struggle to survive as an independent force.<sup>80</sup> To do so, it scrambled to find a role. Initially, the RAF pushed for a Home Defence Air Force to defend against a French air menace.<sup>81</sup> This was followed by a contention that imperial policing could be performed better by the RAF from the air than by the army on the ground.<sup>82</sup> In the 1930s, the RAF opted for a deterrent role, arguing that its ability to deliver a devastating blow to any opponent would both prevent war and save money.<sup>83</sup> This argument, despite its technological weaknesses, was used successfully to obtain funding. In the second half of the decade, a fear of aerial attack led to the development of fighter command.<sup>84</sup> Of the three services, and despite its junior status, the RAF

*and Armoured Forces, 1903–1939* (Manchester, 1995), and, especially, David French, *Raising Churchill's Army. The British Army and the War Against Germany, 1919–1945* (Oxford, 2000), and three of his articles, 'Doctrine and Organization in the British Army, 1919–1932', *HJ*, 44, 2 (2001), 497–515, 'The Mechanization of the British Cavalry Between the World Wars', *WH*, 10, 3 (2003), 296–320, and 'An Extensive Use of Weedkiller': Patterns of Promotion in the Senior Ranks of the British Army, 1919–1939', in French and Sweetman, *British General Staff*, 159–74.

<sup>80</sup> John Sweetman, 'Crucial Months for Survival: The Royal Air Force, 1918–1919', *JCH*, 19 (1984), 529–47. For the inter-war RAF, see Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1984), and Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule. British Air Strategy 1914–1939* (London, 1976).

<sup>81</sup> Hines H. Hall, III, 'British Air Defense and Anglo-French Relations, 1921–1924', *JSS*, 4, 3 (1981), 271–84; John Ferris, 'The Theory of a "French Air Menace", Anglo-French Relations and the British Home Defence Air Force Programmes of 1921–1925', *JSS*, 10, 1 (1987), 62–83; and Neil Young, 'British Home Air Defence Planning in the 1920s', *JSS*, 11, 4 (1988), 416–39.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Paris, 'Air Power and Imperial Defence 1880–1919', *JCH*, 24 (1989), 209–25; David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control. The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester, 1990). For the Army's alternatives, see T. R. Moreman, '“Small Wars” and “Imperial Policing”: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919–1939', *JSS*, 19, 4 (1996), 105–131.

<sup>83</sup> R. J. Overy, 'Air Power and the Origins of Deterrence Theory Before 1939', *JSS*, 15, 1 (1992), 73–101; Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber. The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics 1932–1939* (London, 1980); Bialer, 'Elite Opinion and Defence Policy: Air Power Advocacy and British Rearmament During the 1930s', *BJIS*, 6 (1980), 32–51; Malcolm Smith, 'The Royal Air Force, Air Power and British Foreign Policy, 1932–1937', *JCH*, 12 (1977), 153–74; N. Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power. A History of the British Bomber Force 1923–1939* (London, 1987). For a harsher view, see Scot Robertson, *The Development of RAF Bombing Doctrine, 1919–1939* (Westport, CT, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> John Ferris, 'Fighter Defence Before Fighter Command: The Rise of Strategic Air Defence in Great Britain, 1917–1934', *JMilH*, 63, 4 (1999), 845–84.

faced the fewest domestic opponents. It promised to deter war on the cheap, and, if war should come, it offered a British contribution that would not entail the massive loss of life of a continental commitment. However, its glittering promise of victory was only theoretical, never having been tested.

The effect of all of this on British strategic foreign policy was complicated. Political reality, foreign policy, military doctrine, and financial and economic capacities all collided. Various elements in the foreign-policy making élite pulled in different directions, and various ministers promoted their own departmental concerns in Cabinet, to the detriment of the foreign secretary's control of strategic foreign policy. The service ministries saw things from their own perspective and evaluated threats on the basis of capability rather than intention. The Treasury saw finance as the 'fourth arm of defence' and advocated policies that would keep spending in check. And the Board of Trade wished to pursue British profits. The Foreign Office had the most complex task of all. It had to take into consideration all of the above, evaluate for itself whether potential foreign threats might become reality and suggest policy alternatives. This was not an easy task. Often, the other departments would challenge the Foreign Office's evaluations.

Debates over policy were heard in the CID and, in the 1930s, the inter-departmental committees that were created to oversee Britain's rearmament. The latter included the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC, created in 1933), the Defence Policy and Requirements Committee (DPR, July 1935), and the Defence Policy and Requirements (Defence Requirements) Committee (DPR(DR), January 1936). At a political level, the final authority was the Cabinet, but this was an unwieldy body and, as matters grew more tense and the need for frequent consultation increased, strategic foreign policy was hived off to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy (FPC, established in April 1936), whose membership consisted of those members of the foreign-policy making élite whose portfolios, particular interests or political significance most strongly affected the matter.<sup>85</sup>

The final decisions in all cases belonged to these politicians. They, buffeted by departmental responsibilities and pressures, intellectual currents and special interest groups, also had to wonder how various strategic defence policies would play at the ballot box. The politicians mainly involved – the top level of the foreign-policy making élite – were normally the prime minister, the chancellor of the Exchequer, the secretary of

<sup>85</sup> For the FPC, see Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy. The British Experience October 1938–June 1941* (Cambridge, 1991).

state for foreign affairs and the service ministers (and, after the creation of the office in 1936, the minister for the co-ordination of defence), but could include any cabinet minister. These figures varied with the flux of politics, and their influence and predispositions will be considered as they take office.

Others had more long-term impact on policy. In the inter-war period there were several individuals who had a wide-ranging influence not only on Anglo-Soviet matters, but also on the formulation of British strategic foreign policy generally. One of them was Sir Warren Fisher, the permanent secretary to the Treasury and head of the civil service from 1919 to 1939.<sup>86</sup> Fisher was a man of strong views who believed that he, and his Treasury officials, were capable generalists, able to debate points with the experts within other departments of state. Fisher regarded finance as the 'fourth arm' of defence, and felt that foreign policy must reflect that fact. As a result, Fisher and the Treasury advocated a pro-Japanese stance in the inter-war period. This would reduce the need for spending by the Admiralty. He also felt that Germany could be appeased by economic means, a policy that had the added attraction of helping the British economy.<sup>87</sup> Fisher was no pacifist and was a strong supporter of rearmament. However, his views on foreign policy, with their concomitant impact on the intricacies of defence spending, often put him at odds with both the service ministries and the Foreign Office.

Another vital member of the élite was Sir Maurice Hankey.<sup>88</sup> Hankey served as secretary both to the CID and the Cabinet, the former from 1912 to 1938 and the latter from 1916 to 1938. As secretary to the CID, Hankey had a hand in all its derivative bodies, including the COS, and sat on a number of vital committees, including the DRC. No one in Whitehall knew more than Hankey about defence policy and few knew as much about politics. Hankey was a strong advocate of naval power and imperial defence. He also did not believe that the League of Nations was any guarantor of international order, a position that he held as early as 1916 and maintained until the Second World War.<sup>89</sup> For Hankey, Britain's security could best be maintained by its own

<sup>86</sup> Eunan O'Halperin, *Head of the Civil Service. A Study of Sir Warren Fisher* (London, 1989), and George Peden, *The Treasury and British Public Policy, 1906–1959* (Oxford, 2000), 8–9, 15–16, 134, 138–9 and 298–302.

<sup>87</sup> C. A. MacDonald, 'Economic Appeasement and the German "Moderates", 1937–1939: An Introductory Essay', *PP*, 56 (1972), 105–35.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Roskill, *Hankey. Man of Secrets* (3 vols; London, 1970–4); John F. Naylor, *A Man and An Institution. Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretariat and the Custody of Cabinet Secrecy* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> Roskill, *Man of Secrets*, I, 276.

efforts, particularly by naval strength.<sup>90</sup> He was always to be found on the side of RN in discussions of British strategic foreign policy, and, like the Admiralty, was often willing to make concessions to Germany and Italy until Britain's naval strength was secure. Hankey did not like or trust Soviet Russia. In January 1937, he made his views plain. He felt that Eden was too fond of 'those foul Russians, who, I am sure, would let us down. The latter, unless I am mistaken, only want to get us all embroiled and then to force Bolchevism [sic] on a shattered Europe. They would like to get us all divided and fighting, as they have succeeded in doing to Spain, and to take advantage of the mess to inculcate their sinister theories and methods.'<sup>91</sup>

The Foreign Office was at the centre of British strategic foreign policy, and its personnel need careful consideration. However, before doing this, it is necessary to consider the changed role of Russia in British strategic foreign policy. Immediately before 1914, St Petersburg was one of the three most important posts in the British diplomatic service, reflecting the central importance of Russia for Britain in both Europe and the empire. This changed after 1917. Soviet Russia largely withdrew from normal international relations and retreated into revolutionary isolation, something symbolized by the removal of the capital from St Petersburg to Moscow.<sup>92</sup> Combined with the fact that there were no formal relations between Britain and Soviet Russia from 1918 to 1924, and again from 1927 to 1929, this meant that Moscow was no longer a focal point for British diplomacy.<sup>93</sup>

This change of priorities was reflected in the British diplomatic representation in Soviet Russia.<sup>94</sup> From 1924 to 1927, Britain had only a *chargé d'affaires*, Sir Robert Hodgson, in Moscow. In 1929, following the resumption of diplomatic relations, Sir Esmond Ovey was appointed ambassador. He was succeeded in 1933 by Viscount Chilston, who

<sup>90</sup> Hankey believed in the Victorian quality of 'manliness' with all that it implied for national and 'racial' fitness; see Michael L. Roi, 'German Holidays. Sir Maurice Hankey Meets the "Ultimate Enemy": Nazi Indoctrination and Physical Training and the DRC's Threat Assessment', in Kennedy and Neilson, *Incidents in International Relations*, 113–34.

<sup>91</sup> Hankey to Robin, his son, 31 Jan 1937, Hankey Papers, HNKY 3/42.

<sup>92</sup> Stephen Revell and Stephen White, 'The USSR and Its Diplomatic Partners, 1917–1991', *D&S*, 13, 1 (2002), 31–54.

<sup>93</sup> In Edward Ingram's periodization, the period from 1919 to 1945 in Anglo-Russian relations is termed 'the locked revolving door', reflecting the fact that their long-standing rivalry had been stalled by the First World War; see his 'Great Britain and Russia', in William R. Thompson, ed., *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia, SC, 1999), 269–305, esp. 286–7.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma. British Officials in Russia 1900–1939* (London and Rio Grande, 1997), 183–266, and Michael Hughes, 'The Virtues of Specialization:

was in turn followed by Sir William Seeds (1939–40). None of these men were among the most prominent in the diplomatic service; nor did they have much in common. Hodgson had served in the consular service and became British commercial agent in Vladivostok in 1906. At the latter post he rose to the position of consul in 1911 and, in 1920, was briefly acting high commissioner at Omsk. When the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement was signed in 1921, Hodgson was appointed British Commercial Agent to Moscow and made *chargé d'affaires* in 1924 with the renewal of diplomatic relations. With his long experience of Russia, Hodgson was largely successful in keeping Anglo-Soviet relations on an even keel, offering the 'greatest hospitality' to visiting members of the Foreign Office.<sup>95</sup>

Ovey went to Moscow in 1929 as ambassador, reflecting Labour's determination to improve relations with Soviet Russia. Ovey's career had not marked him out for greatness.<sup>96</sup> After joining the diplomatic service in 1903, he had held a series of minor posts. At the Foreign Office from 1920 to 1924, he served in the Northern Department, which dealt with Soviet Russia. In the latter year, he was transferred to Tehran and then to Rome in 1925. After being appointed envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Mexico in November 1925, he was made ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Brazil in August 1929, but never took up the post. Instead, he was sent to Moscow in December of that same year to renew diplomatic relations, a task that he had performed successfully at Mexico City.<sup>97</sup>

Ovey possessed a certain charm, but initially found Soviet Russia during the five-year plans and collectivization a puzzling world. His problem was compounded by the fact that he spoke no Russian and only a few of his staff did so.<sup>98</sup> The expertise about Russia that had been painfully built up within the diplomatic service before 1917 had attenuated, due both to the radical change of regimes in that country and to the intermittent nature of Anglo-Soviet relations.<sup>99</sup> Ovey's 'easy going and

British and American Diplomatic Reporting on Russia, 1921–1939', *D&S*, 11, 2 (2000), 79–104. The diplomatic service had been amalgamated with the Foreign Office establishment in 1919; see Christina Lerner, 'The Amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service with the Foreign Office', *JCH*, 7, 1 (1972), 107–26.

<sup>95</sup> Owen O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan* (London, 1954), 71.

<sup>96</sup> My account of Ovey's career is based on Gordon W. Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution. Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1995), 49–65.

<sup>97</sup> David Kelly, *The Ruling Few* (London, 1952), 156.

<sup>98</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 224–5.

<sup>99</sup> For the pre-1917 period, see Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, 51–83; Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 13–52; and Michael Hughes, *Diplomacy Before the Russian*

approachable character' did not impress all who worked with him.<sup>100</sup> His belief that 'all nations are very much alike and in particular that we should not act as though the Bolsheviks were any worse than ourselves', raised doubts about his judgement.<sup>101</sup> The consul general in Moscow, Reader Bullard, felt that such views reflected the belief that 'Sir Esmond is morally lazy and the dishonesty of the Soviet leaders does not disgust him.'<sup>102</sup> There was discontent in London over Ovey's handling of the Metro-Vickers crisis in 1933, and later that year he was transferred to Brussels.

His successor was Viscount Chilston. Chilston served just over five years as ambassador, a time full of even more domestic turmoil in Soviet Russia – the Show Trials and the Purges – than usual. This meant the continuation of the difficulties in trying to comprehend the Soviet enigma.<sup>103</sup> Little in Chilston's background had prepared him for his task. As Aretas Akers-Douglas he had joined the diplomatic service in 1898 and had served mainly abroad until 1915. From 1915 to 1918, he was at the Foreign Office in the Contraband Department. He was part of the British Delegation to Paris, Balfour's and then Curzon's diplomatic secretary and, in 1921, transferred to Vienna. He remained in the Austrian capital until 1928, before moving to Budapest the following year. Chilston (he had become the second viscount in 1926) was made ambassador to Soviet Russia in October 1933. While he took office in the strained atmosphere of the immediate aftermath of the Metro-Vickers case, his time in Moscow also coincided with the period of the Soviet espousal of collective security. As a result, and because he was able to get on good personal terms with Litvinov, Chilston was able to smooth Anglo-Soviet relations and remained as ambassador until early in 1939. This did not mean, however, that he enjoyed his time in Moscow. Both he and his wife disliked 'the dinginess and cultural barrenness of Soviet society'.<sup>104</sup> Nor was Chilston optimistic about getting things done in Moscow. As he said, 'the question for a British

*Revolution. Britain, Russia and the Old Diplomacy, 1894–1917* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 20–123.

<sup>100</sup> Sir Roderick Barclay, *Ernest Bevin and the Foreign Office 1932–1969* (London, 1975), 124.

<sup>101</sup> Bullard diary entry, 14 Oct 1932, in Julian and Margaret Bullard, eds., *Inside Stalin's Russia. The Diaries of Reader Bullard 1930–1934* (Charlbury, Oxon, 2000), 144.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–9, diary entry 23 Mar 1933.

<sup>103</sup> The atmosphere is from Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London, 1949), 18–29; 80–121. For the difficulties, see Lord (William) Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 60–4, 96–7.

<sup>104</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 265.



Ambassador here is not how much he can do, but merely how much he can stand'.<sup>105</sup>

Chilston's successor was Sir William Seeds. Seeds had joined the diplomatic service in 1904. He served in various posts abroad, often in Latin America. His post before Moscow was as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Argentina from 1930 to 1935. In the interim between these two posts, Seeds was unemployed. Brought out of retirement to attempt to repair the damage to Anglo-Soviet relations caused by the Munich Agreement, Seeds had a difficult time in Moscow. Although he had the advantage of knowing enough Russian to be able to produce a 'visible sensation' by speaking it in his first interview, the new ambassador was unable to achieve his goal.<sup>106</sup> In May 1939, Litvinov was succeeded by Viacheslav Molotov, and the former's policies were superseded by a more hard-line approach that made Seeds' task difficult if not impossible. Once war had begun in Europe, Anglo-Soviet relations were at their nadir.

These representatives reported on Soviet Russia to the Foreign Office. At the top of that department was the permanent undersecretary (PUS). Five men served as PUS from 1920 to 1939: Sir Eyre Crowe (1920–5), Sir William Tyrrell (1925–8), Sir Ronald Lindsay (1928–30), Sir Robert Vansittart (1930–7) and Sir Alexander Cadogan (1938–46). For Crowe, Tyrrell and Lindsay, Anglo-Soviet matters were episodic. While Crowe, who opposed treating with the Bolsheviks generally, was in office, there were two significant aspects to Anglo-Soviet relations.<sup>107</sup> The first was the threat that Bolshevism posed to Britain and the empire; the second was the negotiation of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreements in 1921 and 1924. With regard to the former, Crowe wished to keep Soviet Russia contained by a barrier – a *cordon sanitaire* of newly created states that would keep Bolshevism at bay.<sup>108</sup> As to the second, Crowe opposed establishing economic relations with Soviet Russia entirely, but found that successive prime ministers favoured such a move. In general, Crowe was a devout believer in the balance of power and in maintaining it by

<sup>105</sup> As reported in Collier's minute, 10 Mar 1941, on Mallet (Stockholm) to FO, 24 Jan 1941, FO 371/29475/N941/29/38.

<sup>106</sup> Seeds to FO, disp 40, 28 Jan 1939, FO 371/23683/N751/105/38.

<sup>107</sup> Sibyl Crowe and Edward Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant. Sir Eyre Crowe, GCB, GCMG, KCB, KCMG 1864–1925* (Braunton, Devon, 1993), 457; Ephraim Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1919–1926* (Brighton, 1994), 146–7.

<sup>108</sup> Maisel, *Foreign Office*, 51–2. For examples, see John Fisher, '“On The Glacis of India”: Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919', *D&S*, 8, 2 (1997), 50–82; and Esa Sundbäck, '“A Convenient Buffer between Scandinavia and Russia”: Great Britain, Scandinavia and the Birth of Finland After the First World War', *JbfGOE*, 42, 3 (1994), 355–75.



Britain's own strength. In 1907, he had written a memorandum that, after the war, had become famous as a definitive expression of both his espousal of the balance of power and his ambivalence towards Germany.<sup>109</sup> This guided his policy towards all states, including Soviet Russia.

Tyrrell had long experience of Russia. As private secretary to the last Liberal foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, Tyrrell had opposed a policy of accommodation with St Petersburg.<sup>110</sup> In 1913 and 1914, Crowe and Tyrrell had agreed that Russia must be dealt with firmly, although the two had differed over German policy. During the war, Tyrrell had done general work in the Foreign Office before being put in charge in 1918 of another wartime innovation, the Political Intelligence Department (PID).<sup>111</sup> After the war, Tyrrell was part of the British delegation to Paris, and then served as an assistant undersecretary while Crowe was PUS.<sup>112</sup> However, he had some dealings with Soviet Russia, serving as head of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Bolshevism as a Menace to the British Empire, which gathered and collated evidence of Bolshevik subversion.<sup>113</sup> As PUS when Austen Chamberlain was foreign secretary, Tyrrell was the author of a clear statement of British policy with respect to Soviet Russia.<sup>114</sup> For Tyrrell, Soviet Russia was 'the enemy'. This was due to the fact that 'ever since the Bolshevik régime was established in Russia its activities have been mainly directed against this country, and that in every part of the world we have been met by its persistent and consistent hostility'. Soviet threats worldwide would be checked by diplomacy: supporting Chinese nationalism in the Far East and promoting the 'reconciliation' of Europe via Locarno. But the important thing for Tyrrell was that 'we

<sup>109</sup> Keith Wilson, 'Sir Eyre Crowe on the Origin of the Crowe Memorandum of 1 January 1907', *BIHR*, 55 (1983), 238–41; Crowe and Corp, *Our Ablest Public Servant*, 114–19.

<sup>110</sup> Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, 32–4.

<sup>111</sup> Erik Goldstein, *Winning the Peace. British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference 1916–1920* (Oxford, 1991), 57–89; Goldstein, 'British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: The Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee, 1918', *MES*, 23, 4 (1987), 419–36; Goldstein, 'The Foreign Office and Political Intelligence 1918–1920', *RIS*, 14 (1988), 275–88, and Alan Sharp, 'Some Relevant Historians – the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, 1918–1920', *AJPH*, 34, 3 (1988), 359–68.

<sup>112</sup> My account of Tyrrell is based on Maisel, *Foreign Office*, 44–5, 54–6.

<sup>113</sup> John Fisher, 'The Interdepartmental Committee on Eastern Unrest and British Responses to Bolshevik and Other Intrigues Against the Empire During the 1920s', *Journal of Asian History*, 34, 1 (2000), 2–3.

<sup>114</sup> 'Foreign Policy in Relation to Russia and Japan', CID 710-B, Tyrrell, 26 Jul 1926, Cab 4/15.

should clear our minds on the subject of Russia and face the fact that we are virtually at war'.<sup>115</sup>

When Tyrrell became ambassador to Paris in 1928, he was succeeded in Moscow by Sir Ronald Lindsay. Lindsay had joined the diplomatic service in 1899 and spent most of his career abroad, including an early posting in St Petersburg. Returning to the Foreign Office in 1908, he was Grey's assistant private secretary until late 1909, at which time he joined the Eastern Department, which then dealt with Russia. He spent six years, from 1913 to 1919, as undersecretary to the Egyptian Ministry of Finance, in which post he gained extensive administrative experience. In 1919, he reverted to the diplomatic service. Lindsay was in the Foreign Office from 1921 to 1924. There he got a taste of Bolshevik subversion, replacing Tyrrell as the chairman of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Bolshevism as a Menace to the British Empire. In the autumn of 1926, Lindsay became ambassador at Berlin where he remained until returning to London to become PUS in July 1928. Due to circumstances, Lindsay's impact on Anglo-Soviet relations as PUS was slight. He came to office after the diplomatic break with Moscow caused by the Arcos raid. When Labour came to power in 1929, determined to renew relations with Soviet Russia, both the new foreign secretary, Arthur Henderson and his parliamentary undersecretary, Hugh Dalton, found Lindsay uncongenial on this and other issues.<sup>116</sup> The result was that Lindsay became ambassador at Washington in 1931, a post he held with distinction until 1939. Thus, 'one of the wisest and best balanced' men in the Foreign Office was removed from the centre of power in London.<sup>117</sup>

Lindsay's successor was Sir Robert Vansittart.<sup>118</sup> When he became PUS at the age of forty-eight, Vansittart was the youngest man to hold that post since Sir Charles Hardinge. Vansittart brought many qualities to his new office.<sup>119</sup> Described as 'brilliant and fiery' by a colleague, he

<sup>115</sup> Tyrrell's minute, 4 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5425/398/38.

<sup>116</sup> Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday. Memoirs 1887–1931* (London, 1953), 218–19, and Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London, 1985), 192–3.

<sup>117</sup> Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, *Money Talks. Fifty Years of International Finance* (London, 1968), 112.

<sup>118</sup> Norman Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (London, 1978); for the early period, see B. J. C. McKercher, 'The Last Old Diplomat: Sir Robert Vansittart and the Verities of British Foreign Policy, 1903–1930', *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 1–38; Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office* (London, 1965), is impressionistic, but valuable. My account of Vansittart is based on these sources and on Vansittart's own memoirs, *The Mist Procession* (London, 1958).

<sup>119</sup> In addition to Rose, *Vansittart*, see Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934–1937* (Westport, CT, 1997), and the articles in *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), devoted to Vansittart.

was an impressive intellectual, gifted in discussion. He possessed a certain literary flair and, like his friend Hankey, believed in the importance of a nation's virility through the possession of armed strength.<sup>120</sup> He also had his weak points. His pugnacity sometimes led, as someone who knew him well believed, to his being 'very apt to strike attitudes on the spur of the moment, sometimes regardless of the practical difficulty experienced by the man at the other end of the wire in giving effect to them'.<sup>121</sup> And, while he insisted on a clarity and freshness of expression from his subordinates, his own memoranda too often seemed to be 'dancing literary horn-pipes'.<sup>122</sup> In fact, Vansittart had a weakness for writing lengthy memoranda and minutes of a didactic sort that irritated, in particular, Eden. This, along with his espousal of an anti-German policy, with all that it entailed for British defence policy, led to his removal as PUS and his appointment as chief diplomatic adviser in 1938.

With respect to policy, Vansittart was a true descendant of Eyre Crowe: a firm believer in the balance of power. This should have placed him among those who favoured co-operation (or even an alliance) with Soviet Russia. However, on this point, he was ambivalent.<sup>123</sup> In his first years as PUS, Vansittart was willing to compromise with both Berlin and Rome in the hope of finding solutions, all the while calling for an increase in British military strength. While the latter was being built up, he was an active supporter of using Moscow to help check Germany and Japan; however, at the crucial discussions in early 1936 over a loan to Moscow, Vansittart opposed it and, instead, threw his weight behind exploring a comprehensive settlement with the 'dictator states'. And, by the time that Munich and the 1939 alliance talks occurred, Vansittart could only hope to affect events by means of personal influence, utilizing his private sources of intelligence.<sup>124</sup>

Vansittart's successor as PUS was Sir Alexander Cadogan.<sup>125</sup> Cadogan, the son of the fifth earl, entered the diplomatic service in 1908. Before the war he served primarily abroad. He was at the Foreign Office

<sup>120</sup> Kelly, *Ruling Few*, 210.

<sup>121</sup> Lampson diary entry, 31 Jan 1936, in M. E. Yapp, ed., *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt. The Diaries of Sir Miles Lampson 1935–1937* (Oxford, 1997), 446.

<sup>122</sup> David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938–1945* (London, 1971), 13.

<sup>123</sup> His ambivalence lasted into retirement; see Lord Vansittart, *Events and Shadows. A Policy for the Remnants of a Century* (London, 1947), 42–68. The complexity of Vansittart's thought about foreign relations can be found in an unpublished chapter of memoirs, 'Somme Toute', Vansittart Papers, VNST II 3/10.

<sup>124</sup> John R. Ferris, '“Indulged In All Too Little”?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 122–75.

<sup>125</sup> My account of Cadogan's early career is based on the introduction in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 1–23.

from 1915 to 1924, but it was at Geneva, from 1924 to 1934, that he made his mark, spending his last four years there as adviser on League of Nations affairs. In 1934 he was appointed, first, minister (1934) and, then, ambassador (1935) at Peking. In February 1936, the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, with whom Cadogan had worked closely at Geneva, brought him back to London. In the summer of 1936, Cadogan acted as the British delegate to the Montreux Conference, and became a deputy undersecretary at the Foreign Office in October. For the next fifteen months, while Eden attempted to remove Vansittart from office, Cadogan was given particular responsibility for Far Eastern matters. He became PUS on 1 January 1938.

Cadogan was the antithesis of Vansittart, in that he was not flamboyant or prone to lengthy minutes and memoranda. Instead, he focused on giving careful advice and ensuring that the Foreign Office worked effectively. His career had given him ample experience of Soviet matters. At Geneva, Soviet Russia had been a difficult player in the deliberations of the Preparatory Commission, which the League Council had created in 1925 to begin the process of disarmament. In 1927 and 1928, the Soviets had put forward 'totally unrealistic proposals for immediate and universal disarmament' that had delayed the entire process.<sup>126</sup> In China, Cadogan had gained an appreciation of the tangled nature of relations between that country, Japan and Soviet Russia. And, at Montreux, Cadogan had experienced the dubious pleasure of working with Litvinov directly.<sup>127</sup> At the Nyon Conference in September 1937, Cadogan was convinced that Soviet Russia was working to block any solution by means of its malign influence in French domestic politics.<sup>128</sup> Cadogan's dislike of the Russians, however, did not mean that he refused to do business with them. While Soviet bargaining methods annoyed him, Cadogan worked hard in 1939 to attempt to effect an Anglo-Soviet alliance.

The PUS did not determine the views of the Foreign Office by himself. Beneath him were the assistant undersecretaries of state, who each supervised several of the departments within the Foreign Office. In May 1925, a layer was added between the PUS and the assistants with the appointment of a deputy undersecretary (beginning in October 1936 there were two such deputies) who oversaw a cluster of assistant undersecretaries and, on occasion, acted in the stead of the

<sup>126</sup> Andrew Webster, 'An Argument Without End: Britain, France and the Disarmament Process, 1925–1934', in Martin Alexander and William J. Philpott, eds., *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 66 n4.

<sup>127</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 11 Jul 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4.

<sup>128</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 16 Sept 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6.

PUS.<sup>129</sup> These men, and the heads of departments, were a key element in the foreign-policy making élite at the Foreign Office.

When considering British strategic foreign policy and Anglo-Soviet affairs, three departments are vital: the Northern (which dealt with Soviet Russia), the Central (which dealt with Germany) and the Far Eastern (which dealt with China and Japan).<sup>130</sup> At first glance the three were equal, but there was a sharp difference in their relative prestige and real power. The Central Department was the lineal descendant of the War Department created at the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 by the amalgamation of the pre-war Western and Eastern Departments that had dealt with, respectively, France and Russia.<sup>131</sup> After the war, the Central Department was the most important and busiest department in the Foreign Office, and it and those who served in it – and their suggestions – were often favoured over the other departments, particularly by Austen Chamberlain.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, the Northern Department was a backwater. In 1928, its prestige and influence were weakened when one of the assistant undersecretaries, J. D. Gregory, a former head of the Northern Department and a leading authority on Soviet Russia, was forced to resign due to a financial scandal.<sup>133</sup> Nor were its members generally considered the best and the brightest, even by its long-time head, Laurence Collier.<sup>134</sup> As for the Far Eastern Department, it was often the target of abuse. In February 1926, its head, Sydney Waterlow, was removed; Austen Chamberlain's having 'lost all confidence' in him.<sup>135</sup> This did not end the foreign secretary's problems with the Far Eastern Department. 'I cannot help continually feeling the contrast between the grip & force of our Central Department', he wrote in December 1926, '& the uncertainties, lamentations, regrets & contradictions of the Far Eastern Department.'<sup>136</sup> Throughout the 1930s, such views of the Far Eastern Department continued.

<sup>129</sup> For a list of Foreign Office assistant and deputy undersecretaries, see Appendix I.

<sup>130</sup> For the heads of these departments, see Appendix II. For a list of their members, see Appendix III.

<sup>131</sup> Zara Steiner, 'The Foreign Office and the War', in F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, 1977), 516–31, is essential.

<sup>132</sup> Valentine Lawford, *Bound for Diplomacy* (London, 1963), 235, 238–50; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, 121; J. D. Gregory to O'Malley, 15 Jan 1927, O'Malley Papers.

<sup>133</sup> Gill Bennett, *History Notes. 'A Most Extraordinary and Mysterious Business': The Zinoviev Letter of 1924* (London, 1999), 56–66.

<sup>134</sup> Collier to Strang, 22 Nov 1932, Strang Papers, STRN 4/6.

<sup>135</sup> Waterlow to O'Malley, 4 Feb 1926, O'Malley Papers, vol. I.

<sup>136</sup> A. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 2 Dec 1926, in Robert C. Self, ed., *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters. The Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with His Sisters Hilda and Ida, 1916–1937* (Cambridge, 1995), 297.

These three departments contained a number of individuals whose influence and tenure require further examination. Collier was the key figure in the Northern Department. Having dealt with Russia during the war as a member of the War Department, he served at the British embassy in Tokyo from 1919 to 1921, before returning to the Foreign Office, where he worked in the Treaty and Far Eastern Departments until joining the Northern Department in 1926.<sup>137</sup> From that time until he became minister to Norway in 1941, Collier remained in the latter department, as its head from 1933 onwards. A small man with a stammer who used to entertain the junior members of the Northern Department with his anecdotes, Collier found himself marginalized in the Foreign Office.<sup>138</sup> Not only were his politics too liberal for most of his colleagues, but also he was a strong advocate of a return to 'old diplomacy' in the form of making common cause with Soviet Russia, despite the fact that he had no illusions about Soviet sincerity and did not believe in the long-term compatibility of British and Soviet interests.<sup>139</sup>

His reasons for advocating improved relations with Moscow were straightforward: Britain and Soviet Russia both faced the same threats and this community of peril would be sufficient to bind them together. Not for him was either the belief in the essential rectitude of the Soviet position held by the fellow-travellers on the political left or an acceptance of Litvinov's sophism that 'peace is indivisible'. For Collier, it was simply a matter of practical politics. As he noted in 1934 about co-operation with Soviet Russia, 'since we live among a number of Powers, few of whom really wish us well but some of whom have the same interests as ourselves, we should, whenever possible, encourage the latter to join with us in defending the *status quo* against those whose interests (in their own view) demand its overthrow'.<sup>140</sup> This brought him into conflict with others within the Foreign Office.

Prominent among these was Orme Sargent, head of the Central Department from 1926 to 1933, at which time he became the assistant undersecretary who supervised that department. 'Molely' as he was

<sup>137</sup> For Collier's time in the War Department, see Sir Laurence Collier, 'The Old Foreign Office', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 312 (1972), 256–61, and his 'Impressions of Sir Eyre Crowe', nd [c. 1972], Collier Misc 466.

<sup>138</sup> Barclay, *Ernest Bevin*, 7. I would like to thank Professor Erik Goldstein for allowing me to read his entry on Collier for the *New Dictionary of National Biography*, upon which my account of Collier, except where otherwise noted, is based.

<sup>139</sup> He likewise rejected the idea that 'isolation is preferable to attempts to preserve peace by pacts and alliances'; see his untitled memo for Vansittart, 16 May 1935, Vansittart Papers, VNST 2/21.

<sup>140</sup> Collier's minute on 'Memorandum on Russo-Japanese Tension', Randall, 9 Feb 1934, FO 371/18176/316/F823/23.

universally known, was noted for his cool, detached views. Possessed of a 'dry and caustic sense of humour', Sargent affected a disinterest in the doings of the politicians. When they did not follow his advice, he was 'disinclined . . . to do more than shrug his shoulders as though to say: if they wished to go the shortest way to perdition, who was he to prevent them?'<sup>141</sup> However, this 'disillusioned dry-humoured stoic' was by no means a passive participant in debate.<sup>142</sup> Soviet Russia often drew his ire. He was deeply annoyed by the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, feeling that it threatened to extend Britain's commitments under Locarno, and believed that, through the Comintern, Moscow exercised an unhealthy influence in French politics. While Sargent was an opponent of appeasement, he did not wish to tie Britain to Moscow's coat-tails.

Sir Victor Wellesley was as closely associated with the Far Eastern Department as Collier was with the Northern.<sup>143</sup> He was head of the Far Eastern Department from 1920 until 1924, at which point he became an assistant undersecretary. A year later he became deputy undersecretary, an appointment he held until he was forced to retire in October 1936. Both as assistant and as deputy undersecretary, Wellesley kept a close eye on the Far East. He was an advocate of the Foreign Office's being more closely involved in trade matters, and this involved him in disputes with the Treasury over lines of demarcation.<sup>144</sup> This quarrel spilled over into Far Eastern policy generally, as Wellesley was largely responsible for shaping the new British policy for China adopted by Chamberlain in 1926, which was opposed not only by some within the Foreign Office itself, but also by the Treasury.<sup>145</sup> With respect to Soviet Russia, Wellesley shared the general view of the Far Eastern Department that communism did not pose a serious threat in China, as it was antithetical to Chinese tradition.<sup>146</sup> Wellesley believed that Soviet Russia had a useful role in the Far East: to act as a check to Japanese aggression. His doubts about the possibility of finding a clear solution to Britain's problems in the Far East led some to

<sup>141</sup> Sir William Hayter, *A Double Life* (London, 1974), 82; Lawford, *Bound for Diplomacy*, 268–9.

<sup>142</sup> John Balfour, *Not Too Correct an Aureole. The Recollections of a Diplomat* (Wilton, Wilts, 1983), 47.

<sup>143</sup> I would like to thank Professor Erik Goldstein for letting me read his entry on Wellesley for the *New Dictionary of National Biography*. Wellesley's views about foreign policy are in his *Diplomacy in Fetters* (London, 1944), 43–125.

<sup>144</sup> Boadle, 'The Formation of the Foreign Office Economic Relations Section'.

<sup>145</sup> See Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat. Britain's South China Policy, 1924–1931* (Oxford, 1991), 81–104, esp. 92–3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–6.



think of him as pessimistic or defeatist, but any inability to produce a policy reflected only the complexity of the problem, not Wellesley's disposition.<sup>147</sup>

One other individual, William Strang, played a significant role in Anglo-Soviet relations.<sup>148</sup> Strang was the only person both to serve in all three departments under consideration and to spend time in Soviet Russia. Originally bound for academia, Strang joined the Foreign Office after service in the First World War. After serving abroad he returned to the Foreign Office and the Northern Department in late 1922. Here he had an opportunity to observe both the difficult Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations in 1924 and the uproar caused by the Zinoviev letter in that same year. He was transferred to the Far Eastern Department in late 1925, and spent just over four years working on what he termed 'the rather sterile and unreal exercises' of that department.<sup>149</sup> In 1930, he accepted a posting to Moscow, where he observed first-hand the early phases of the five-year plans and was intimately involved in the diplomatic imbroglio surrounding the arrest and trial of British engineers employed in Moscow by Metro-Vickers. When he returned to London in the autumn of 1933, Strang became the adviser on League of Nations affairs, and accompanied various ministers on their missions abroad, including Eden on the latter's trip to Moscow in 1936.

In 1937, Strang became the head of the Central Department. Here he worked closely with his immediate supervisor, Sargent. While Strang was an advocate of a strong Britain, he initially did not share Sargent's and Vansittart's deep-seated dislike of Germany. Strang did, however, have an aversion to Soviet Russia, the product, especially, of his time there and the Metro-Vickers affair. In 1939, as a result of the Central Department's reputation for getting things done and the relative standing of Collier and Strang, the latter and his department were put in charge of the Anglo-Soviet alliance negotiations. This culminated in Strang's accompanying the British delegation to Moscow in July 1939 and produced his final disillusionment with the Soviets.

Opinions about Soviet Russia at the Foreign Office were varied. Some, like the head of the Southern Department, Owen O'Malley, and R. F. Hadow, who served successively as first secretary at Vienna and Prague from 1931 to 1937 before returning to the FO and the Northern

<sup>147</sup> Strang, *Home and Abroad*, 59; Kelly, *Ruling Few*, 210; and O'Malley, *Phantom Caravan*, 94.

<sup>148</sup> Strang, *Home and Abroad*, 50–69.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



Department, loathed the Bolsheviks.<sup>150</sup> O'Malley went so far as to describe Russia under the Bolsheviks as 'a spiritual gas-chamber, a sinister, unnatural and unholy place'.<sup>151</sup> Collier saw Bolshevism as one of the variants of the twentieth-century tendency – under the guise of ideology – to suppress the individual in favour of the collective: 'the nightmare of Fascism has been succeeded by the nightmare of Soviet Communism'. In his view, each person had a moral duty to oppose these 'nightmares' vigorously.<sup>152</sup> Vansittart regarded Soviet policy as motivated by a fear of external threats. For some with long experience of Russia – Sir Lancelot Oliphant was typical of them – Soviet Russia was just tsarist Russia with a variant ideology.<sup>153</sup> Russian foreign policy, whether driven by autocrats and pan-Slavism or by commissars and communism, had to be resisted wherever and whenever it threatened British interests.

For several reasons, it is now important to consider the nature of Soviet policy in the period from 1919 to 1939. First, the historical arguments about what British policy was (and should have been) towards Soviet Russia are embedded in it. Second, it is difficult to understand British strategic foreign policy and the Soviet impact upon it without some knowledge of Soviet policy, which in turn is difficult to divorce from the assumptions behind the various historical interpretations. Finally, a discussion of Soviet policy allows us to appreciate that the wide range of views about its nature held by the British foreign-policy making élite were dependent on assumptions not dissimilar from those that underpin modern scholarship.

Scholarly opinion on the nature of Soviet foreign policy is sharply divided.<sup>154</sup> Some, arguing from what might be termed a Cold War

<sup>150</sup> Lindsay W. Michie, *Portrait of an Appeaser. Robert Hadow, First Secretary in the British Foreign Office, 1931–1939* (Westport, CT, 1996), 3–5, 52–5, 147–8. O'Malley had participated in the Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations in 1924. For the context, see Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism, and the Foreign Office'.

<sup>151</sup> O'Malley, *Phantom Caravan*, 70. This view resulted in part from his journey through Soviet Russia.

<sup>152</sup> Collier outlined his views of and opposition to political quietism in analytical form; see his *Flight From Conflict* (London, 1944). The quotation is from ix. For another analysis of Bolshevism by a diplomatist, see J. D. Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy. Rambles and Reflections 1902–1928* (London, 1928), 151–69.

<sup>153</sup> Oliphant supervised the Northern Department from 1929 to 1936 and then became deputy undersecretary with the same responsibility; see Lancelot Oliphant, *An Ambassador in Bonds* (London, 1946).

<sup>154</sup> For analyses of the literature, see Teddy J. Uldricks, 'Soviet Security Policy in the 1930s', in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991. A Retrospective* (London and Portland, OR, 1994), 65–74; Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano, 'Introduction', in Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano, eds., *Russia in the Age of Wars 1914–1945* (Milan, 2000), xiv–xviii.

perspective, have argued that Stalin, beginning in 1927, always aimed at provoking an inter-imperialist war.<sup>155</sup> In this version of events, the focus is on Soviet–German relations. At its most virulent, this school contends that both Stalin’s policy at Munich and the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact were aimed at eventually extending Soviet control over eastern Europe, a policy which culminated in the post-1945 occupation of that region.<sup>156</sup> For such authors, Stalin’s foreign policy was driven by untrammelled revolutionary ideology. Others have argued to the contrary, that Stalin was not an ideologue; that his policy decisions were based on pure *Realpolitik*.<sup>157</sup> In this version, ‘Stalin’s policy appears to have been rational and level-headed – an unscrupulous *Realpolitik* serving well-defined geopolitical interests.’ The Soviet leader intended to satisfy these interests by avoiding any commitments that would put Soviet Russia at risk and curtail his freedom of manoeuvre. There are also those who argue that Soviet offers of co-operation with the West against Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan were sincere.<sup>158</sup> According to this ‘collective security’ line of argument, the failure to reach any Anglo-Soviet accord before 1941 was due to the anti-communist prejudices of the British foreign-policy making élite.

The two extreme interpretations – the ‘Cold War’ view and the ‘collective security’ approach – provide more heat than light. Both suffer from the same defects of argument that affect the ‘guilty men/appeasement’ and ‘declinist’ schools. With Soviet policy viewed as either entirely honourable or entirely unscrupulous (the British response to it is similarly judged), there is no room to consider other, more nuanced explanations. The argument that Soviet foreign policy was based solely on *Realpolitik*, while of more value, is not entirely satisfactory. To accept it

<sup>155</sup> Robert C. Tucker, ‘The Emergence of Stalin’s Foreign Policy’, *SR*, 36, 4 (1977), 563–89; Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York and London, 1990); Gerhard L. Weinberg, ‘Germany Diplomacy Toward the Soviet Union’, *SU/US*, 18, 1–3 (1991), 317–32; Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany* (2 vols.; Chicago and London, 1970–80).

<sup>156</sup> R. C. Raack, *Stalin’s Drive to the West 1938–1945* (Stanford, 1995); Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934–1938* (Ithaca and London, 1984).

<sup>157</sup> An idea pre-eminently espoused by Gabriel Gorodetsky; see his ‘The Impact of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact on the Course of Soviet Foreign Policy’, *CMRS*, 31, 1 (1990), 27–42; ‘The Formulation of Soviet Foreign Policy: Ideology and *Realpolitik*’, in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 30–44; ‘Geopolitical Factors in Stalin’s Strategy and Politics in the Wake of the Outbreak of World War II’, in Pons and Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars*, 235–50; and *Grand Delusion. Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven and London, 1999), 316–23. The following quotation is from the latter, 316.

<sup>158</sup> Carley, 1939, and Shaw, *British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, are among the most recent.

would be to ignore the historical reality that most of those who made British strategic foreign policy and directed the course of Anglo-Soviet relations believed that the tenets of communism affected Soviet policy.<sup>159</sup>

Other interpretations, less extreme in their assumptions, do exist. In them, Soviet policy is seen to stem from an ideological view of the world, but an ideology with sufficient flexibility in its practical implementation to enable Moscow to pursue many possible lines of action.<sup>160</sup> This approach sees first Lenin and then Stalin as weighing their opportunities and being quite agreeable to taking one step backwards in order to take two steps forward (for example, being willing to ally with either the liberal democracies or the Nazis or imperial Japan in order to ensure Soviet security). These scholars regard Soviet foreign policy as inseparable from Soviet domestic policy, itself based on ideological convictions.<sup>161</sup>

This *Primat der Innenpolitik* approach, which is largely the one adopted in this book, accounts nicely for the swings in Soviet policy. An outline of some its interpretations and salient points is useful here, in order to provide some context for what follows. When Lenin and his immediate successors judged that economic *rapprochement* with the West was necessary in order to make the New Economic Policy (NEP) work, this did not mean that they had abandoned a Marxist analysis of events. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that, paralleling the NEP's friendlier attitude towards Western capitalists was a mobilization of Soviet Russia's military capabilities designed to make the cradle of socialism invulnerable to the inevitable depredations of the encircling capitalist world.<sup>162</sup>

This determination to make Soviet Russia proof against external threat was also integral to the policies of industrialization and collectivization

<sup>159</sup> I return to this matter in the conclusion.

<sup>160</sup> Central to this is the trilogy by Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–1933. The Impact of the Depression* (New York, 1983); *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933–1939* (London, 1984); and *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East 1933–1941* (London, 1992). Haslam has extended his analysis to 1941: 'Soviet Foreign Policy 1939–1941: Isolation and Expansion', *SU/US*, 18, 1–3 (1991), 103–21, and 'Litvinov, Stalin and the Road Not Taken', in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 55–62. The other key figure is Geoffrey Roberts; see his *The Unholy Alliance. Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (London, 1989), and *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke and London, 1995). For differences between the two, see Haslam, 'Soviet–German Relations and the Origins of the Second World War: The Jury Is Still Out', *JMH*, 69, 4 (1997), 785–97. Another important work in this category is Silvio Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War 1936–1941* (London and Portland, OR, 2002).

<sup>161</sup> For discussion, see Gorodetsky, 'The Formulation of Soviet Foreign Policy'.

<sup>162</sup> David R. Stone, *Hammer and Rifle. The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926–1933* (Lawrence, KS, 2000), 1–7.

undertaken by Stalin in 1928–9. However, by 1933, the twin threats posed by Japan and Germany made Stalin realize that Soviet interests might be protected, not just by the strength of Soviet arms, but also by co-opting the strength of others.<sup>163</sup> Soviet Russia thus embarked on several parallel policies. On the one hand, there was a policy of accommodation with Japan and Germany. In the Far East, while simultaneously strengthening Soviet arms in the region and engaging in armed border clashes with Tokyo, Moscow was willing to negotiate border settlements and fishing treaties with Japan and even to bargain away the Chinese Eastern Railway in an attempt to avoid full-scale hostilities. At the same time, Soviet Russia continued to support anti-Japanese elements in China in the hope that Japan would expend its energies struggling in the Chinese quagmire. Here, the security of Soviet Russia against hostile threats – the latter perceived in ideological terms – took precedence over promoting the fraternal solidarity of the Chinese Communist Party, which felt the sting of the Nationalist army armed with Soviet weaponry.<sup>164</sup>

A similar mixture of practical policy within the context of ideological presuppositions was followed in Europe. While engaging in vituperative slanging matches with the Nazis, the Soviets were careful to keep open lines of communication with Berlin in the hope that they could effect a return to the policy of collaboration between Soviet Russia and Germany that had existed between 1922 and 1933.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, the Soviets also tried to mend fences with other countries in the West. Russia established diplomatic ties with Washington in 1933, joined the League of Nations in 1934 and made it clear through the Comintern and its policy of the united front against fascism that Moscow would be willing to help check the revisionist Powers.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Fascist War Threat and Soviet Politics in the 1930s', in Pons and Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars*, 147–58, argues that ideologically based fear of foreign aggression provoked the Great Terror.

<sup>164</sup> Jonathan Haslam, 'Soviet Aid to China and Japan's Place in Moscow's Foreign Policy, 1937–1939', in I. Nish, ed., *Some Aspects of Soviet-Japanese Relations in the 1930s* (London, 1982), 35–58; see also John W. Garver, 'The Origins of the Second United Front: The Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party', *China Quarterly*, 113 (1988), 29–59.

<sup>165</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, 'A Soviet Bid for Coexistence with Nazi Germany, 1935–1937: The Kandelaki Affair', *IHR*, 16, 3 (1994), 466–90. The 'Cold War' view sees a continuity between this and the Nazi-Soviet Pact; see Hochman, *Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*, 123–4.

<sup>166</sup> For the Comintern's autonomy, see Jonathan Haslam, 'The Comintern and Origins of the Popular Front 1934–1935', *HJ*, 22, 3 (1979), 673–91; and Geoff Roberts, 'Collective Security and the Origins of The People's Front', in Fyrth, *Britain, Fascism and*

Stalin pursued both these policies until 1939. However, the continued successes of the revisionist Powers and the unwillingness of the liberal democracies to oppose the former on Soviet terms led to an abandonment of the dual policy. Stalin famously remarked in March 1939 that Soviet Russia would not pull the West's chestnuts out of the fire; what he failed to mention was that he had discovered that neither would the West save Moscow's chestnuts. The first intimation of this change in policy had occurred earlier, with the purge of Soviet Russia's diplomatic representatives in 1937.<sup>167</sup> The acceptable face of Soviet diplomacy, in the person of Litvinov and his sophisticated and urbane colleagues (most of whom had pre-revolutionary roots), was replaced by the hard-faced insular men thrown up by the revolution. The final phase was marked by the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact, itself a topic of great contention between the various schools of thought concerning Soviet foreign policy.<sup>168</sup>

How did all this affect British policy? Did ideology determine policy? The demonstration of simple antipathy towards Moscow and communism is not enough to provide explanation. None of the British élite liked Soviet Russia.<sup>169</sup> However, this did not mean that none of them were willing to co-operate with it. Here was the real divide. And it is

*the Popular Front*, 74–88. Also important are Haslam, 'The British Communist Party, the Comintern, and the Outbreak of War, 1939: "a nasty taste in the mouth"', *D&S*, 3, 1 (1992), 147–54; Anna Di Biagio, 'Moscow, the Comintern and the War Scare, 1926–1928', in Pons and Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars*, 83–102; and Kevin McDermott, 'Stalinist Terror in the Comintern: New Perspectives', *JCH*, 39, 1 (1995), 111–30.

<sup>167</sup> Teddy J. Uldricks, 'The Impact of the Great Purges on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', *SR*, 36, 2 (1977), 187–204, and Sabine Dullin, 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs: The Fate of an Administration Under Stalin, 1930–1939', in Pons and Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars*, 121–46. The latest interpretation of Litvinov's dismissal is Albert Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact', *E-AS*, 52, 1 (2000), 33–56.

<sup>168</sup> See, in addition to Haslam, 'Soviet–German Relations', Rolf Ahmann, 'Soviet Foreign Policy and the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939: An Enigma Reassessed', *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali*, 2 (1989), 349–69; Teddy J. Uldricks, 'Evolving Soviet Views of the Nazi–Soviet Pact', in Richard Frucht, ed., *Labyrinth of Nationalism. Complexities of Diplomacy: Essays in Honor of Charles and Barbara Jelavich* (Columbus, OH, 1992), 331–60; Geoffrey Roberts, 'Infamous Encounter? The Merekalov–Weizsäcker Meeting of April 1939', *HJ*, 35, 4 (1992), 921–26; and Ingeborg Fleischauer, 'Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler–Stalin Pact', in Bern Wegner, *From Peace to War. Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Providence, RI and Oxford, 1997), 27–45.

<sup>169</sup> Louise Grace Shaw, 'Attitudes of the British Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union', *D&S*, 13, 1 (2002), 55–74. I exclude the 'Cambridge Comintern'; for them, see Robert Cecil, 'The Cambridge Comintern', in Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension. Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London and Basingstoke, 1984), 169–98.

important to note that this divide was not congruent with the split between ‘guilty men’ and ‘anti-appeasers’, with the former adamantly opposed to collaboration with the godless Bolsheviks and the latter willing to join hands with Moscow’s sincere advocates of collective security. The reality was more complex. For example, Sargent and Strang are lauded as staunch anti-appeasers, yet Sargent was opposed to any dealings with Moscow, and Strang’s attitude was ambivalent. The same could be said of both Eden and Vansittart, whose positions changed to catch the prevailing political winds. It was not for nothing that Strang was unwilling to support Eden’s retrospective claims that he had always been unvarying in his opposition to such things as appeasement.<sup>170</sup>

The real key to understanding how Soviet Russia affected the British élite is to realize that there was a continuum of beliefs about Moscow. Which part of the continuum was dominant depended on circumstances, with regard both to the international situation and to the relative positions within the hierarchy held by various members of the élite. As there was no monolith of opinion about Soviet Russia, each episode in Anglo-Soviet relations – and how Soviet Russia affected British strategic foreign policy – must be considered in its own context. The attempt to do so is the essence of this volume.

There is yet one final matter – the selection of beginning and end dates for this study – that needs explanation. The choice was complicated by the book’s dual purpose. It is an examination of both British strategic foreign policy and Britain’s policy towards Soviet Russia. My decision was to begin in late 1919, after the Paris Peace Conference and to end with the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact. My resolution derives from both Soviet and British considerations, and the reasons for it will become clear in the course of this study. How the book is structured also requires discussion.<sup>171</sup> The approach taken here is asymmetrical. The *first* chapter deals with the era from 1919 to 1933, while the remaining chapters examine the period from 1933 to 1939. This has been done for several reasons. The first is that the years from 1919 to 1933 were relatively benign. During this period, the revisionist Powers had not yet challenged the existing international order by force of arms. As a result, it was not until 1933 that the British began to consider the need to rearm in order to check this unpleasant tendency. In this fourteen-year period of ‘persuasion’, international relations operated on

<sup>170</sup> Peter Beck, ‘Politicians Versus Historians: Lord Avon’s “Appeasement Battle” Against “Lamentably, Appeasement-Minded” Historians’, *TCBH*, 9, 3 (1998), 396–419, esp. 410–11, 416.

<sup>171</sup> I would like to thank John Ferris for valuable discussions of what follows.

the basis of the new world order created after the war. As such, the era needs to be treated as a distinct unit, and not solely as a precursor to what followed. And, during it, Anglo-Soviet relations were marginal and the effect of Soviet Russia on British strategic foreign policy slight.

This was not the case in the six-year period of 'deterrence' after 1933.<sup>172</sup> This was a malignant interval, operating on the basis of thinly veiled (and, after 1939, naked) force. But how the *status quo* Powers could utilize force (and how much force they had available to them) was conditioned by the attitudes and circumstances of the period of 'persuasion'. The result of the sea change in international affairs in 1933 was that both British and Soviet Russian policy changed direction. Soviet Russia emerged out of isolation and intimated that it would be willing to play a role in curbing the revisionist trend. Britain began reluctantly to rearm. With Soviet and British policies becoming at least potentially complementary, if not congruent, Moscow became a greater factor in British strategic foreign policy and the course of Anglo-Soviet relations deepened. For these reasons, and because the pace and intensity of international affairs increased so markedly after 1933, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order* concentrates on this time period.

<sup>172</sup> For the manifold meanings of the term, see Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence. A Conceptual Analysis* (2nd edn, Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi, 1983), 49–78.

# 1      The period of persuasion: British strategic foreign policy and Soviet Russia, 1919–1933

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In August 1920, the Red Army was turned back from the gates of Warsaw. Seven months later, on 18 March 1921, the Treaty of Riga was signed. The Soviet attempt to spread Bolshevism throughout Europe by force of arms had ended.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Lenin and his Bolshevik government decided on a new course.<sup>2</sup> Domestically, the initial effort to establish a communist economy – war communism – was abandoned in favour of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Abroad, Soviet Russia strove to establish diplomatic relations and trade ties with the capitalist Powers. As part of this undertaking, an Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement was signed on 16 March 1921. Britain's relations with Soviet Russia had begun, although Moscow was not formally recognized by London until 1 February 1924.

From 1919 to 1933, Soviet Russia played a limited, although significant role in British strategic foreign policy. During this relatively peaceful period in international affairs, Britain's focus was on dealing with the problems that arose in the aftermath of the First World War. Domestic tranquillity had to be ensured and the economy needed to be repaired. A new international order, based on the Versailles system, had to be established. In this period, particularly after 1925, British strategic foreign policy was mainly concerned with arms control and disarmament. Driven by the legacies of the First World War, successive governments pursued a pacific policy aimed at reducing both defence expenditure and the likelihood of war.<sup>3</sup> Soviet Russia affected British affairs in two

<sup>1</sup> Though they were hopeful about and ready to support any proletarian revolution; see David R. Stone, 'The Prospect of War? Lev Trotskii, the Soviet Army, and the German Revolution in 1923', *IHR*, 25, 4 (2003), 799–817.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley and London, 1994), 15–26.

<sup>3</sup> Dick Richardson, *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s* (London and New York, 1989). Defence ministers avoided Treasury control of their spending until 1924: John Robert Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy. The Evolution of British Strategic Foreign Policy, 1919–1926* (Ithaca, 1989); Ferris, 'Treasury Control, the Ten Year Rule and British Service Policies, 1919–1924', *HJ*, 30, 4 (1987), 859–83.



principal areas: British domestic policy and British strategic foreign policy both in Europe and in the empire. While these two facets of British policy were interconnected, for ease of analysis the effect of Soviet Russia on British domestic affairs will be considered separately.

At the end of the First World War, there was concern that the conflict had 'brutalized' Britain itself.<sup>4</sup> This anxiety combined with mass unemployment, labour unrest, political turmoil in both Ireland and India and a fear that the existing order was under attack by new ideologies (such as communism) to create uncertainty about the future.<sup>5</sup> The British response to these perceived threats occurred on at least two fronts: there was, first, an effort to create the myth that Britain was a 'peaceable' state; and, second, a determination to externalize the causes of the unrest by arguing that its origins were 'alien'.<sup>6</sup> The 'Red threat' posed by Soviet Russia was often felt to be at the root of all these problems.<sup>7</sup> The murder of the Russian royal family, tales of atrocities, the general savagery of the Bolsheviks and the violence of the post-war communist uprisings throughout Europe and on 'Red Clydeside' supported arguments that communism was both anti- and thoroughly un-British.<sup>8</sup> The fact that a number of the Bolshevik leaders were Jews resulted in anti-semitic fears about the supposed threat that both Russian Jewish immigrant communities in London posed to the British way of life and 'international Jewry' posed to the British Empire.<sup>9</sup>

Everywhere there was fear of domestic communist subversion.<sup>10</sup> Even ex-servicemen's organizations were kept under surveillance, and soldiers looking to participate in imperial settlement schemes were screened in

<sup>4</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *JMH*, 75, 3 (2003), 557–89.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900–1921* (London, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Hendley, 'Anti-Alienism and the Primrose League: The Externalization of the Postwar Crisis in Great Britain 1918–1932', *Albion*, 33, 2 (2001), 243–69; Adrian Gregory, 'Peculiarities of the English? War, Violence and Politics: 1900–1939', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, 1 (2003), 44–59.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service. The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), 224–45, 259–338; Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia. A History of Political Espionage in Britain 1790–1988* (London, 1989), 151–74.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma. British Officials in Russia 1900–1939* (London and Rio Grande, 1997), 117–82. British intelligence was patchy: Jennifer Siegel, 'British Intelligence on the Russian Revolution and Civil War – A Breach at the Source', *INS*, 10, 3 (1995), 468–85.

<sup>9</sup> Gisela C. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918–1939* (London, 1978), 47–110; Markku Ruotsila, 'The Antisemitism of the Eighth Duke of Northumberland's the Patriot, 1922–1930', *JCH*, 39, 1 (2004), 71–92.

<sup>10</sup> British intelligence services were not immune to subversion: Victor Madeira, 'Moscow's Inter-war Infiltrations of British Intelligence, 1919–1929', *HJ*, 46, 4 (2003), 915–33.

order to prevent the spread of Bolshevism.<sup>11</sup> There was also particular concern about labour.<sup>12</sup> The visit of British trade unionists and members of the Labour Party to Soviet Russia, threats by the Trades Union Congress that any British action in the Russo-Polish War of 1920–1 would be resisted by organized labour and the growth of a British Communist Party all combined to create a ‘Red scare’ in Britain.<sup>13</sup> This threat was exaggerated by many in the intelligence community due to both their own dislike of Bolshevism and the utility of this fear for obtaining funding.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, there was ample information, emanating from signals intelligence and operatives in places such as Reval (modern Tallinn) and Moscow, on Soviet Russia’s real threat to British domestic security.<sup>15</sup> The linkage between communists and other subversive groups, such as the Irish Republican Army, accentuated these concerns.<sup>16</sup>

These fears spawned a plethora of anti-Soviet, ‘patriotic’ organizations, including the National Party, the British Commonwealth Union and the Comrades of the Great War.<sup>17</sup> These, and the more established and respectable Primrose League, whose leaders included Conservative Party luminaries such as Lord Curzon, Stanley Baldwin and William Joynson-Hicks, helped spread an antipathy towards and fear of Soviet

<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Ward, ‘Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918–1920’, *HJ*, 16, 1 (1973), 179–88; David Englander and James Osborne, ‘Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class’, *HJ*, 21, 3 (1978), 593–621, and Englander, ‘The National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the Labour Movement, 1918–1920’, *History*, 76, 246 (1991), 24–42; Keith Jeffery, ‘The British Army and Internal Security 1919–1939’, *HJ*, 24, 2 (1984), 377–97; Kent Fedorovich, *Unfit for Heroes. Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester, 1995), 36–7.

<sup>12</sup> Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, 142–4, 147–8 and 151–74.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen White, ‘British Labour in Soviet Russia, 1920’, *EHR*, 119, 432 (1994), 621–40; White, ‘Labour’s Council of Action 1920’, *JCH*, 9, 4 (1974), 99–122; White, ‘British Labour and the Russian Revolution: The Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920’, in John Hiden and Aleksander Loit, eds., *Contact or Isolation? Soviet–Western Relations in the Interwar Period* (Stockholm, 1991), 231–48; L. J. Macfarlane, ‘Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920’, *PP*, 38 (1968), 126–52; and Andrew Thorpe, ‘The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–1945’, *HJ*, 43, 3 (2000), 777–800.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Madeira, ‘“No Wishful Thinking Allowed”: Secret Service Committee and Intelligence Reform in Great Britain, 1919–1923’, *INS*, 18, 1 (2003), 1–20.

<sup>15</sup> P. Tomaselli, ‘C’s Moscow Station – The Anglo-Russian Trade Mission as Cover for SIS in the Early 1920s’, *INS*, 17, 3 (2002), 173–80; C. G. McKay, ‘Our Man in Reval’, *INS*, 9, 1 (1994), 88–111; Victor Madeira, ‘“Because I Don’t Trust Him, We are Friends”: Signals Intelligence and the Reluctant Anglo-Soviet Embrace, 1917–1924’, *INS*, 19, 1 (2004), 29–51.

<sup>16</sup> Emmet O Connor, ‘Communists, Russia, and the IRA, 1920–1923’, *HJ*, 46, 1 (2003), 115–31.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–1939. Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester and New York, 2000), 38–60; Ruotsila, ‘Antisemitism’.

Russia.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Red Russia was the stuff of British adventure fiction, a sinister state poised to threaten Britain and the empire.<sup>19</sup> Film was similar: the 'new' Russia was depicted as an empire every bit as evil as its tsarist predecessor and, later, its post-1945 successor.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, for the political left – although not for the Labour Party – Soviet Russia became the *beau idéal*.<sup>21</sup> The 'mental maps' of Soviet Russia were rapidly established in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution.

Ideological dislike did not mean that Soviet Russia was excluded when British strategic foreign policy was formulated. As premier, Lloyd George saw Soviet Russia as essential both to the reconstruction of Europe and to Britain's economic revival.<sup>22</sup> Despite the vociferous anti-Bolshevism of his secretary of state for war, Winston Churchill, and the concerns about the Bolshevik threat to the empire of his foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, Lloyd George signed the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement, with only its clauses forbidding Bolshevik propaganda representing Curzon's insistence on a *quid pro quo*.<sup>23</sup> Lloyd George hoped to

<sup>18</sup> Hendley, 'Anti-Alienism', 253–7.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Neilson, 'Tsars and Commissars: W. Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden* and Images of Russia in British Adventure Fiction, 1890–1930', *CJH*, 27, 3 (1992), 487–500; Eric Homburger, 'English Spy Thrillers in the Age of Appeasement', *INS*, 5, 4 (1990), 80–92.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Shaw, 'Early Warnings of the Red Peril: A Pre-History of Cold War British Cinema, 1917–1939', *Film History*, 14 (2002), 354–68.

<sup>21</sup> F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism. The Impact of a Revolution* (London, 1982), 181–209; Andrew J. Williams, *Labour and Russia. The Attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR, 1924–1934* (Manchester, 1989); Daniel F. Calhoun, *The United Front. The TUC and the Russians 1923–1928* (Cambridge, 1976); and Stephen White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy* (London and Basingstoke, 1979), 27–55, 204–33.

<sup>22</sup> G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy During the Curzon Period, 1919–1924* (London, 1995), 60–75; Keith Neilson, 'That elusive entity British policy in Russia': The Impact of Russia on British Policy at the Paris Peace Conference', in Michael Dockrill and John Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Peace Without Victory?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), 67–101; Richard K. Debo, 'Lloyd George and the Copenhagen Conference of 1919–1920: The Initiation of Anglo-Soviet Negotiations', *HJ*, 24, 2 (1981), 429–41; Debo, 'Prelude to Negotiations: The Problem of British Prisoners in Soviet Russia November 1918–July 1919', *SEER*, 58, 1 (1980), 58–75; Thomas S. Martin, 'The Urquhart Concession and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1921–1922', *JbfGOE*, 20, 4 (1972), 551–70; Andrew Williams, 'The Genoa Conference of 1922: Lloyd George and the Politics of Recognition', in Carole Fink, Axel Frohn and Jürgen Heideking, eds., *Genoa, Rapallo, and European Reconstruction in 1922* (Washington and Cambridge, 1991), 29–48; Anne Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction After the First World War* (Cambridge, 1990), 160–3; and Stephanie C. Salzmann, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union. Rapallo and After, 1922–1934* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2003), 7–18.

<sup>23</sup> M. V. Glenny, 'The Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, March 1921', *JCH*, 5, 2 (1970), 63–82.

follow this up with a more comprehensive agreement with the Soviets at Genoa the following year. However, on 17 April 1922, Berlin and Moscow announced instead the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo, which ushered in a period of Soviet–German co-operation and brought an end to Lloyd George’s Russian schemes.<sup>24</sup>

The new Conservative government that came into power in 1922 was not as interested in improving relations with Soviet Russia as its predecessor had been. Without Lloyd George to restrain him, Curzon turned steadily towards a more confrontational approach.<sup>25</sup> Utilizing decrypted telegrams, Curzon pieced together a picture of Soviet subversion against British interests and, on 8 May 1923, issued the ‘Curzon ultimatum’, which called upon Moscow to cease and desist its revolutionary activities or risk termination of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. This had the desired result. Despite this, it was clear that there was little chance for good relations between the two states as long as the Conservatives remained in power.

The life of the Conservative government was short. When Labour came to power in January 1924, the possibility of improved Anglo-Soviet relations increased. The new government, strongly influenced in its foreign policy by former Radical Liberals (who now favoured recognizing Soviet Russia as much as they had wished to break relations with tsarist Russia) and by the need to alleviate unemployment through foreign trade, recognized the country’s new government.<sup>26</sup> There was not an abundance of ideological overlap between Labour and communism; on the contrary, the Labour hierarchy, and particularly Prime Minister J. Ramsay MacDonald, disavowed both the aims and the methods of the Soviet government. In fact, during his tenure as premier, MacDonald became aware of the reality of the ‘Red menace’.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Stephen White, *The Origins of Detente. The Genoa Conference and Soviet–Western Relations, 1921–1922* (Cambridge, 1985), 147–65, Peter Kürger, ‘A Rainy Day, April 16, 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and the Cloudy Perspective for German Foreign Policy’, in Fink, Frohn and Heideking, *Genoa, Rapallo*, 49–64, and Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction*, 183–207; see J. David Cameron, ‘Carl Graap and the Formation of Weimar Foreign Policy Toward Soviet Russia from 1919 Until Rapallo’, *D&S*, 13, 4 (2002), 75–95.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union*, 111–13; White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 141–72.

<sup>26</sup> White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 204–33, and Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce. Anglo-Soviet Relations 1924–1927* (Cambridge, 1977), 7–12.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Andrew, ‘The British Secret Service and Anglo-Soviet Relations in the 1920s, Part I: From the Trade Negotiations to the Zinoviev Letter’, *HJ* 20, 3 (1977), 673–706; Trevor Barnes, ‘Special Branch and the First Labour Government’, *HJ*, 22, 4 (1979), 941–51.

The focus of Labour's policy towards Moscow was to improve economic relations.<sup>28</sup> An Anglo-Soviet conference was held in London from 14 April to 7 August 1924. These talks were bedevilled by issues that were to remain at the centre of all Anglo-Soviet trade talks. The Soviets wanted a British loan guaranteed by the government; the British wanted compensation both for lapsed tsarist bonds and for property in Russia seized by the Bolsheviks. London desired to deal with the issue of the money borrowed from Britain by the tsarist government during the First World War and the related matter of the fate of the unspent portion of these loans now held by Barings (the so-called Baring balances).<sup>29</sup> By the beginning of July, there was an impasse.<sup>30</sup> The Soviet offers of compensation were 'utterly vague' and dependent on new loans being granted in London. This created little incentive for the latter. 'Why should new bondholders lend on next to no security', a senior official at the Treasury pointed out, 'in order to pay old bondholders a mere fraction of their claims?' The British wanted to cancel war debts, but only in the context of a general settlement with the other Allies, particularly the United States.

Despite these difficulties, negotiations went forward for political reasons. Arthur Ponsonby, Labour's parliamentary undersecretary for foreign affairs, noted that a breakdown in the negotiations would be a 'calamity from an international, national, not to speak of [a] party point of view'.<sup>31</sup> This resulted in a treaty, signed on 8 August, but it contained more style than substance. The Soviets accepted that there must be compensation, but the details were left to a subsequent treaty, which would also determine the nature of a loan to Soviet Russia.

However, the existing treaty of 8 August had to be ratified by Parliament. And, at this point, Soviet activities impinged on British politics. The Liberals withdrew their support for the Labour government. Two issues were at the heart of this: discontent over the vague nature of the Soviet trade treaty and a decision by Labour not to charge the acting

<sup>28</sup> Gorodetsky, *Precarious Truce*, 13–35; Andrew J. Williams, *Trading with the Bolsheviks. The Politics of East-West Trade 1920–1939* (Manchester and New York, 1992), 75–7; and David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), 361–4. For Anglo-Soviet trade in the 1920s, see R. Munting, 'Becos Traders and the Russian Market in the 1920s', *Journal of European Economic History*, 25, 1 (1996), 69–96.

<sup>29</sup> Summarized in Otto Niemeyer (controller of finance, Treasury) to Snowden (chancellor of the Exchequer), 25 Jan 1924, and 'Financial Questions Which Would be Involved by Proposals to Grant "De Jure" Recognition to Russia', ns, 22 Jan 1924, both Hopkins Papers, T 175/5; background in Keith Neilson, *Strategy and Supply. The Anglo-Russian Alliance, 1914–1917* (London, 1984), and Vincent Barnett, 'Calling up the Reserves: Keynes, Tugan-Baranovsky and Russian War Finance', *E-AS*, 53, 1 (2001), 151–69.

<sup>30</sup> Niemeyer to Snowden, 2 Jul 1924, Hopkins Papers, T 175/5.

<sup>31</sup> Ponsonby to Snowden, 21 Jul 1924, Hopkins Papers, T 175/5.

editor of the communist *Worker's Weekly* for encouraging soldiers used as strike-breakers to disobey their orders.<sup>32</sup> The result was a vote of no confidence in early October and MacDonald's decision to call an election. During the election campaign, another Soviet bombshell exploded: the publication of a letter purportedly from Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, to the Communist Party of Great Britain, calling on the latter to push for the ratification of the trade treaty and to set up cells in the British army.<sup>33</sup> While the circumstances surrounding the Zinoviev letter remain controversial, the letter itself is now known to be a forgery. However, its political impact was to help to weaken Labour's showing at the polls.

The new Conservative government wasted no time in refusing to ratify the new trade treaty. The government was full of those – Joynson-Hicks at the Home Office and Churchill at the Treasury – who disliked Soviet Russia and wished to pursue a hostile policy towards it. Austen Chamberlain, the secretary of state for foreign affairs, did not. He preferred to follow a policy of 'aloofness' towards Soviet Russia.<sup>34</sup> To understand why, it is necessary to consider the general nature of Chamberlain's policy. In January 1925, Chamberlain and senior members of the Foreign Office met to work out the new government's policy.<sup>35</sup> By 20 February, 'the basis and outline' of Chamberlain's policy were complete.<sup>36</sup> The principal issue was how to reconcile French fears about security with German demands to rejoin the comity of nations. Chamberlain wished to guarantee France's security, if necessary by treaty. This would allow German concerns to be dealt with free of any French rancour: 'until we can quieten France, no concert of Europe is possible, and we can only quieten France if we are in a position to speak to her with the authority of an Ally'.

<sup>32</sup> Gorodetsky, *Precarious Truce*, 32–5; N. D. Siederer, 'The Campbell Case', *JCH*, 9, 2 (1974), 143–62.

<sup>33</sup> On Zinoviev, see Sibyl Crowe, 'The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal', *JCH*, 10, 3 (1975), 407–32; Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'The Other "Zinoviev Letters" – New Light on the Mismanagement of the Affair', *Slavic and Soviet Studies*, 3 (1976), 3–30; Andrew, 'The British Secret Service and Anglo-Soviet Relations in the 1920s, Part I'; E. H. Carr, 'The Zinoviev Letter', *HJ*, 22, 1 (1979), 209–10; Christopher Andrew, 'More on the Zinoviev Letter', *HJ*, 22, 1 (1979), 211–14; John Ferris and Uri Bar-Joseph, 'Getting Marlowe to Hold His Tongue: The Conservative Party, the Intelligence Services and the Zinoviev Letter', *INS*, 8, 4 (1993), 100–37; and Gill Bennett, *History notes. 'A Most Extraordinary and Mysterious Business': The Zinoviev Letter of 1924* (London, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> A. Chamberlain to Churchill, 5 Nov 1925, Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/258.

<sup>35</sup> Richard S. Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe. British Foreign Policy 1924–1929* (London and Portland, OR, 1997), 38.

<sup>36</sup> Chamberlain's preface (19 Feb) on 'British Policy Considered in Relation to the European Situation', Harold Nicolson, 20 Feb 1925, FO 371/10727/C2201/459/18.

But a French alliance would cut across the bows of the new world order. What of the League and collective security? Here, Chamberlain was dismissive. 'The League of Nations is a wholly admirable institution', he contended, and '[i]n many minor questions it has already played a useful part, but at present, and probably for many years, it will be unsafe to count upon its authority being sufficient to restrain a Great Power'. What of the belief that alliances were likely to cause war? Chamberlain was fully aware of this issue. As he wrote on 19 February 1925: 'Public opinion in this country is intensely suspicious of any particular undertaking, and both the Liberal and Labour Parties in their present mood are ready to start on the warpath at the first indication that I could be contemplating a regional pact.'<sup>37</sup> Chamberlain, however, was not deterred: 'Yet I am firmly convinced', he concluded, of the need to 'proceed from the particular to the general'.

How did Soviet Russia fit into this scheme? In Chamberlain's analysis, Europe was 'divided into three main elements, namely, the victors, the vanquished and Russia'. Moscow was a complication in dealing with the reconciliation of the former pair; an 'incessant, though shapeless menace'. In fact, Soviet Russia was 'the most menacing of all our uncertainties; and it must thus be in spite of Russia, perhaps even because of Russia, that a policy of security must be framed'. This explains why Chamberlain preferred to follow a line of 'aloofness' towards Soviet Russia. And such a policy might have other benefits. As he put it in July 1925, 'the more indifference we show, the more frightened the Soviet Govt are of us. The more we talk to them the better they are pleased. When we court them, they feel that they are dangerous, but when we ignore them, they begin to ask themselves what is to become of them.'<sup>38</sup>

However much Chamberlain wished to ignore Soviet Russia, it was impossible to do so completely. This was clear in the negotiations of the Locarno Pact.<sup>39</sup> Locarno was intended to ensure European stability

Quotations in this and the following two paragraphs are from the latter except where otherwise indicated.

<sup>37</sup> This and the following two quotations are from A. Chamberlain to Crewe, 19 Feb 1925, FO 371/10727/C2450/459/18.

<sup>38</sup> A. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 11 Jul 1925, in R. Self, ed., *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters. The Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with His Sisters Hilda and Ida, 1916-1937* (Cambridge, 1995), 278. An overview of Chamberlain's policy towards Soviet Russia is in Grayson, *Chamberlain*, 253-73.

<sup>39</sup> Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy. Germany and the West, 1925-1929* (Princeton, 1972), and his re-consideration, 'Locarno, Britain and the Security of Europe', in Gaynor Johnson, ed., *Locarno Revisited. European Diplomacy 1920-1929* (London and New York, 2004), 11-32. Compare Grayson, *Chamberlain*, 32-115; Sibyl Eyre Crowe,



until such things as arms control and the League proved their worth.<sup>40</sup> But earlier events had shown that Soviet Russia had the potential to disrupt the Locarno plans. Rapallo had demonstrated that Moscow had the ability to complicate British attempts to reconcile Germany and France.<sup>41</sup> When France invaded the Ruhr in January 1923, the British were concerned that this might create a Franco-Soviet alliance, that Berlin might turn towards Moscow or that communism might spread into Germany as a result of the economic dislocation.<sup>42</sup> None of this came to pass, but the threat that Germany might turn to the East remained.

While Locarno was primarily concerned with assuaging French fears about its security, tying Germany's future to the West rather than to the East and Soviet Russia was also a secondary concern for London. After Locarno, this concern emerged again in British thinking about the Treaty of Berlin, which Germany signed with Soviet Russia in June 1926. Designed to reassure Moscow that Locarno did not mean that Germany was abandoning the Rapallo accords (and to keep German options open), the Treaty of Berlin also had the potential to mean that, in a recent writer's felicitous phrase, the 'battle for the German soul' was being lost.<sup>43</sup> However, British concerns about this possibility were tempered by a realization that the Germans wished to maintain links to both the Western Powers and Soviet Russia and by a belief that a willing acceptance of this desire by London would promote a more stable eastern Europe and keep the Germans aligned with the West.<sup>44</sup> None the less, the fact that Soviet Russia needed to be considered at all

'Sir Eyre Crowe and the Locarno Pact', *EHR*, 87 (1972), 49–74; M. Dockrill, 'The Evolution of British Diplomatic Strategy for the Locarno Pact, 1924–1925', in M. Dockrill and B. J. C. McKercher, eds., *Diplomacy and World Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890–1950* (Cambridge, 1996), 115–35; Frank McGee, "'Limited Liability"? Britain and the Treaty of Locarno', *TGBH*, 6, 1 (1995), 1–22. For 'transatlantic' approach, see Patrick O. Cohrs, 'The First "Real" Peace Settlements After the First World War: Britain, the United States and the Accords of London and Locarno, 1923–1925', *CEH*, 12, 1 (2003), 1–31.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Towle, 'British Security and Disarmament Policy in Europe in the 1920s', in R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke, and M. Howard, eds., *The Quest for Stability. Problems of West European Security 1918–1957* (Oxford, 1993), 127–53.

<sup>41</sup> Salzmänn, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union*, 33–44, 55–76 and 119–36.

<sup>42</sup> Elspeth Y. O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Salzmänn, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union*, 55; Gaynor Johnson, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D'Abernon, 1920–1926* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 131–4; Harvey L. Dyck, 'German–Soviet Relations and the Anglo-Soviet Break, 1927', *SR*, 25 (1966), 67–83; R. P. Morgan, 'The Political Significance of German–Soviet Trade Negotiations, 1922–1925', *HJ*, 6, 2 (1963), 253–71.

<sup>44</sup> D'Abernon (ambassador, Berlin) to FO, tel 93 urgent, 1 Apr 1926, FO 371/11791/N1489/718/38, and D'Abernon to FO, tel 103, 9 Apr 1926, FO 371/11791/N1593/718/38.



underlined the fact that it could never be far from Britain's policy towards Germany and European security generally.

Soviet Russia was similarly important for arms control. Although Moscow did not formally join the efforts at Geneva, Soviet representatives both attended and participated. Their role reflected Soviet concerns about their own security, and they played the differing aims of the Germans and the French against each other. The Germans planned to use the talks to undermine Versailles and regain a position of equality with France; the French wished to prevent this unless their own security was guaranteed. Soviet Russia had no desire to see the conference succeed. First, the secret military collaboration between Moscow and the Weimar Republic, which would probably vanish if the conference were successful, was important to Moscow.<sup>45</sup> Second, Franco-German conciliation would move Berlin further into the Western camp, weakening Rapallo and raising Soviet fears about capitalist encirclement.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Soviets were obstructive, much to the annoyance of Robert Cecil, the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who was responsible for Britain's disarmament policy at Geneva.<sup>47</sup> Particularly galling was the proposal for total disarmament, put forward by the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, Maxim Litvinov, a proposal that had no chance of being accepted, but that could be used to great propaganda effect. Neither the Conservatives under Stanley Baldwin nor Labour could find a way to co-operate with Soviet Russia at Geneva.

If we look at the way in which Soviet Russia played into British strategic foreign policy with respect to the empire, this result was not surprising. The Soviet threat seemed everywhere, as the Inter-departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest (IDCEU) noted.<sup>48</sup> The IDCEU investigated threats to Britain's eastern empire, and found Bolshevism to be the

<sup>45</sup> John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command. A Military-Political History 1918–1941* (London, 1962), 247–82.

<sup>46</sup> Soviet policy also moved to block any Franco-German economic *rapprochement*: Michael Jabara Carley and Richard Kent Debo, 'Always in Need of Credit: The USSR and Franco-German Economic Co-operation, 1926–1929', *FHS*, 20, 3 (1997), 315–56.

<sup>47</sup> Cecil to A. Chamberlain, 26 Nov 1926, Cecil Papers, Add MSS 51079.

<sup>48</sup> Orest Babij, 'The Making of Imperial Defence Policy in Britain, 1926–1934', unpublished Dphil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2003, 25–66. For Anglo-Soviet imperial clashes, see Markku Ruotsila, 'The Churchill–Mannerheim Collaboration in the Russian Intervention, 1919–1920', *SEER*, 80, 1 (2002), 1–20; John Fisher, '"On the Glacis of India": Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919', *D&S*, 8, 2 (1997), 50–82; A. L. Macfie, 'British Intelligence and the Turkish National Movement, 1919–1922', *MES*, 37, 1 (2001), 1–16; Macfie, 'British Views of the Turkish National Movement in Anatolia, 1919–1922', *MES*, 38, 3 (2002), 27–46; John R. Ferris, '"Far Too Dangerous a Gamble"? British Intelligence and Policy During the Chanak Crisis, September–October 1922', *D&S*, 14, 2 (2003), 139–84; Bülent Gökay, *A Clash of*

Red thread tying them together. In 1926, the IDCEU catalogued Bolshevik intrigues in Afghanistan, China, Persia and Turkey and suggested possible responses.<sup>49</sup> The timing of the IDCEU's recommendations was not accidental. The chiefs of staff (COS) were convinced that Soviet Russia, no less than tsarist Russia, remained a real threat to India. They also concluded that Britain could not drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan should it be seized. On 30 July 1926, the COS were asked by the Cabinet to investigate the problem further.<sup>50</sup> By December, everything was coming to a head. While the miners' strike had ended, there were still fears about communist influence in Britain. There was also unhappiness about the functioning of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement of 1921, felt to be used as a mechanism to dump goods in Britain. The issue of the defence of India had not been resolved, and the fine hand of the Comintern was seen behind the efforts of the Chinese Nationalists to interfere with British interests in that country. As J. D. Gregory, one of the assistant undersecretaries at the Foreign Office, put it:

the Soviet is to all intents and purposes – short of direct armed conflict – at war with the British Empire. Whether by interference in the strikes at home or by fomenting the anti-British forces in China, in fact, by her action all the world over, from Riga to Java, the Soviet Power has as its main objective the destruction of the British Power. To that all its other activities are subordinated.<sup>51</sup>

Despite this root-and-branch condemnation of Soviet Russia, Gregory did not advocate breaking off relations, a point of view that was broadly shared by Britain's leading diplomats.<sup>52</sup>

*Empires. Turkey Between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism 1918–1923* (London and New York, 1997): Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia 1918–1925* (London and Portland, OR, 1990); Manoug J. Somakian, *Empires in Conflict. Armenia and the Great Powers 1895–1920* (London and New York, 1995), 131–252; David Kelly, 'End of the Great Game: British Intervention in Russia's Southern Borderlands and the Soviet Response', *JSMS*, 13, 4 (2000), 84–100; Dennis Ogden, 'Britain and Soviet Georgia', *JCH*, 23 (1988), 245–58; John Fisher, 'The Interdepartmental Committee on Eastern Unrest and British Responses to Bolshevik and Other Intrigues Against the Empire During the 1920s', *Journal of Asian History*, 34, 1 (2000), 1–34.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes and papers (EU series) in Air 5/485.

<sup>50</sup> Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear': British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922–1939", *CJH*, 28, 2 (1993), 194–200; Sergei Borisovich Panin, 'The Soviet–Afghan Conflict of 1925–1926 over the Island of Urta-Tugai', *JSMS*, 12, 3 (1999), 122–33.

<sup>51</sup> 'Russia: Memorandum by Mr Gregory', 10 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5670/387/38. This was sent to the heads of major missions.

<sup>52</sup> The consensus at the FO can be found in: 'Arguments against breaking off relations', ns (but nd), 7 Dec 1926, FO 371/11787/N5452/387/38; the views in Ronald Lindsay (ambassador, Berlin), 3 Feb 1927, Ronald Graham (ambassador, Rome), 4 Feb 1927, George R. Clerk (ambassador, Constantinople), 2 Feb 1927, Eric Phipps (counsellor, Paris), 26 Jan 1927, T. Vaughan (minister, Riga), 27 Jan 1927, all FO 371/12589/

This was also Austen Chamberlain's position.<sup>53</sup> The foreign secretary informed his Cabinet colleagues that a breach with Soviet Russia would not change those aspects of Russian policy which were obnoxious, would disrupt eastern Europe and would provide ammunition for those in Germany who wished to forsake co-operation with the West. This would upset Chamberlain's cherished Locarno agreements and turn Germany towards a Bismarckian policy of co-operation with Soviet Russia via Rapallo.<sup>54</sup> Further, he warned that the consequences with respect to labour relations 'might be disastrous'. Another warning was issued by Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the president of the Board of Trade.<sup>55</sup>

Despite Chamberlain's arguments, events and his colleagues proved too strong to resist. The escalating unrest in China – Joynson-Hicks argued that the Chinese leaders were 'Bolshie in heart' – forced the foreign secretary to act.<sup>56</sup> A British protest note of 23 February 1927 resulted in a combative Soviet response and a further deterioration in relations.<sup>57</sup> Chamberlain still retained his belief that breaking off relations was unwise. He 'dread[ed]' doing so 'not for the sake of Russia but for its reactions on Europe & especially on Germany and the Baltic States'.<sup>58</sup> However, the foreign secretary knew that 'the toes of my colleagues are itching to kick them [the Soviets] even tho' it be but a useless gesture'. The Foreign Office shared the beliefs of Chamberlain's colleagues.<sup>59</sup> The final straw came on 12 May, when the Metropolitan Police raided the premises jointly occupied by the All-Russian Co-operative Society (Arcos) and the Soviet Trade Delegation.<sup>60</sup> Despite the scanty evidence

N590/209/38, and W. Max Muller (Minister, Warsaw), 9 Feb 1927, FO 371/12589/N682/209/38.

<sup>53</sup> 'Diplomatic Relations with the Soviet Government', CP 25(27), A. Chamberlain, 24 Jan 1927, Cab 24/184; Gregory and Tyrrell on this paper, FO 371/12589/N342/209/38.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Schinness, 'The Conservative Party and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1925–1927', *ESR*, 7 (1977), 393–407; minutes on Maj. G. M. Mindersley to Locker-Lampson, 13 Jul 1926, FO 371/11786/N3316/387/38.

<sup>55</sup> 'Trade Relations with Russia', CP (27)27, P. Cunliffe-Lister, 28 Jan 1927, Cab 24/184. Hodgson had argued for improved trade earlier: disp 348, 6 May 1926, FO 371/11786/N2241/387/38; Cunliffe-Lister to A. Chamberlain, 21 Jan 1927, Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

<sup>56</sup> Joynson-Hicks to A. Chamberlain, 7 Jan 1929, Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

<sup>57</sup> Gorodetsky, *Precarious Truce*, 211–21.

<sup>58</sup> A. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 27 Feb 1927, in Self, *Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*, 310.

<sup>59</sup> Minute, C. M. Palaiet, 5 Apr 1927, FO 371/12590/N1571/209/38.

<sup>60</sup> Harriette Flory, 'The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927', *JCH*, 12 (1977), 707–23; Christopher Andrew, 'British Intelligence and the Breach with Russia in 1927', *HJ*, 25, 4 (1982), 957–64.

found to support allegations of espionage, the Cabinet decided to break off relations with Soviet Russia, a decision effected on 26 May.<sup>61</sup>

This rupture of relations did not mean that Soviet actions and intentions could now be ignored; there remained the threat posed to India. The India Office linked the Bolshevik danger on the north-west frontier to similar concerns about China, and argued that to retreat in one place was to risk problems in the other.<sup>62</sup> This view was widely shared.<sup>63</sup> On 18 February, Churchill wrote to Lord Birkenhead, the secretary of state for India, suggesting that a sub-committee of the CID be created to examine the menace to India. At the same time, Churchill argued that it was important to 'focus the importance of the Russian danger in our minds in the same way as the German danger was considered before the Great War'.<sup>64</sup> On 17 March, at the height of the tension caused by the exchange of notes, the CID met to consider the matter further.<sup>65</sup> Sir George Milne, the chief of the Imperial General Staff (IGS), argued that Russia was a threat to India, and a sub-committee (chaired by Birkenhead) was struck to consider the problem. Before the sub-committee could formulate its report, the CID met on 14 July to consider the Soviet menace.<sup>66</sup> Here, Chamberlain made clear that he viewed Moscow as the chief threat to peace. This was due not only to Moscow's actions, overt and covert, against Britain and the empire, but also to the 'war scare' that the Soviet leadership had created in late 1926 and early 1927.<sup>67</sup>

When the Birkenhead committee presented its report late in 1927, it concluded that the defence of Afghanistan against Soviet Russia remained a vital British commitment.<sup>68</sup> This report was discussed at

<sup>61</sup> For a hard-line opinion, see William Bridgeman to M. R. Bridgeman, 25 May 1927, in Philip Williamson, ed., *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics. The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman, 1904–1935* (London, 1988).

<sup>62</sup> Hirtzel (PUS, IO) to A. Chamberlain, 17 Jan 1927, A. Chamberlain Papers, FO 800/260.

<sup>63</sup> Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914–1941*, (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 56–69.

<sup>64</sup> Churchill to Birkenhead, Churchill to Hankey, both 18 Feb 1927, both T 172/1569.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes, 223rd meeting CID, 17 Mar 1927, Cab 2/5.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, 229th meeting CID, 14 July 1927, Cab 2/5.

<sup>67</sup> On the war scare, cf. John Sontag, 'The Soviet War Scare of 1926–1927', *RR*, 34, 1 (1975), 66–77; Alfred Meyer, 'The War Scare of 1927', *SU/US*, 5, pt 1 (1978); Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The Foreign Threat During the First Five-Year Plan', *SU/US*, 5, pt 1 (1978), 26–35; Kenneth D. Slepyan, 'The Limits of Mobilisation: Party, State and the 1927 Civil Defence Campaign', *E-AS*, 45, 5 (1993), 851–68; N. S. Simonov, '"Strengthen the Defence of the Land of Soviets": The 1927 "War Alarm" and Its Consequences', *E-AS*, 48, 8 (1996), 1355–64; David R. Stone, *Hammer and Rifle. The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926–1933* (Lawrence, KS, 2000), 43–63.

<sup>68</sup> 'Defence of India. First Report of Sub-Committee', CID 158-D, Birkenhead, 19 Dec 1927, Cab 6/5.

the CID in January 1928, where Milne argued that Soviet Russia was the chief threat to British imperial security.<sup>69</sup> The CID concluded that should Soviet Russia attack Afghanistan such action would constitute a *casus belli*. Later that year, a second body, the Persian Gulf Sub-Committee, took the argument further, and warned of potential Soviet threats to the Middle East.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the JPC developed contingency plans to deal with such attacks.<sup>71</sup> All of these called for operations against the Soviet periphery, with British forces operating out of the Black Sea, Iraq and India, as naval blockade had been judged to be ineffectual against Soviet Russia.<sup>72</sup> Thus, just as was the case before 1914, the 'bear and the whale' remained potential adversaries, each unable to use direct force against the other.<sup>73</sup> The viceroy of India, Lord Irwin (the future Lord Halifax), echoed the frustrations of his predecessors when he wrote of the 'necessity of getting Russia into the comity of nations again' in order to secure the defence of India.<sup>74</sup> This was more easily said than done, and Soviet Russia remained, in Chamberlain's words, 'by far the most dangerous point in the world'.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, when Labour took power in 1929, Anglo-Soviet relations were at a low point, and Soviet Russia was viewed as perhaps the only major threat to Britain's global position. However, Labour had campaigned on a platform of extending recognition to Moscow. MacDonald intended to improve relations between Britain and Soviet Russia through a process of gradual engagement: first, he would 'confront' the Soviets with their misdeeds and hope to 'bring them to their senses'; second, he believed that he could get the Bolsheviks to recognize some of their obligations and 'gradually get an economic hold over them that they could, and would, not shake off'.<sup>76</sup> While the Foreign Office was dubious about the efficacy

<sup>69</sup> Minutes, 232nd meeting CID, 26 Jan 1928, Cab 2/5.

<sup>70</sup> 'The Persian Gulf. Interim Report of a Sub-Committee', CID 169-D, Hailsham (lord chancellor and chairman), 29 Oct 1928, Cab 6/5.

<sup>71</sup> 'Russia - Possible Subsidiary Operations Against', JP 31, Wing Commander R. H. Peck, 12 Dec 1927, Cab 55/5; 'Subsidiary Operations in the Black Sea', JP 34, Admiralty (Plans Division), 8 Feb 1928, Cab 55/5; 'Russia - Plan for Subsidiary Operations against Russia in Perso-Iraq Area', JP 45, C. L. N. Newall (director of operations and intelligence, Air Staff), 29 Jan 1930, Cab 55/5.

<sup>72</sup> Minutes, 'Russia' sub-committee of the ATB, 23 July and 8 Oct 1927, Cab 47/7; 'Economic Pressure on Soviet Russia', CID 845-B, C. P. Hermon-Hodge (secretary, ATB), 28 Nov 1927, Cab 4/17. For the ATB, see Orest Babij, 'The Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War', *Northern Mariner*, 7, 3 (1997), 1-10.

<sup>73</sup> Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford, 1995), 110-46.

<sup>74</sup> Irwin to Cecil, 8 Oct 1928, Cecil Papers, Add MSS 51084.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes, 242nd meeting CID, 2 May 1929, Cab 2/5.

<sup>76</sup> Minute, conversation with MacDonald (2 Dec 1926) at the FO; minutes by Gregory (3 Dec), Tyrrell (4 Dec) and A. Chamberlain (13 Dec), FO 371/11787/N5425/389/38.

of such an approach (and Stalin's attitude towards it, although this was not known to the British, made its success unlikely),<sup>77</sup> MacDonald was determined to implement his plan.

Here, the prime minister was reverting to what he had attempted earlier. MacDonald's policy had not changed significantly since 1924. The arguments about trade remained the same, the concerns about Soviet subversion and propaganda were constant, and there remained optimistic beliefs that European disarmament and peace would be more easily obtained if Russia were brought back into Europe, a view particularly held by Arthur Henderson, the foreign secretary.<sup>78</sup> The result was the renewal of formal relations and efforts to obtain a new trade agreement. The negotiations found that the earlier problems still existed.<sup>79</sup> There were divided views within the Labour Party itself, the Foreign Office wanted a cessation of Soviet propaganda, the Treasury was unwilling to loan the Soviets money, and the Board of Trade wished to extend credits to the Soviets in order to facilitate British commercial efforts in Soviet Russia.<sup>80</sup> The result was a two-year Temporary Commercial Agreement, signed in April 1930, but no progress on the issues of Russian debts and British government loans.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet Russia stood on the periphery of British strategic foreign policy, certainly more foe than friend, but a foe whose intentions and capabilities were only dimly known. There was a great divergence of opinion about its place in British policy. Labour was more inclined to good relations with Moscow than were the Conservatives; however, Labour's leaders, with the exception of Henderson, were pessimistic. Various departments had equally divided views. The Foreign Office was hostile to Soviet Russia, as was the War Office. However, these two departments rarely made common cause because of their differing views about the Soviet threat in the Far East. The Foreign Office believed that communist activities in China, despite the evidence of subversion discovered in a raid on the offices of the Soviet Embassy's compound in Peking on 6 April 1927, were unlikely

<sup>77</sup> Stalin to Molotov, 9 Sept 1929, in Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, eds., *Stalin's Letters to Molotov* (New Haven and London, 1995), 178.

<sup>78</sup> Donald M. Lammers, 'The Second Labour Government and the Restoration of Relations with Soviet Russia (1929)', *BIHR*, 37, 95(1964), 60-72; David Carlton, *MacDonald versus Henderson. The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government* (London, 1970), 144-62; Andrew Williams, 'The Labour Party's Attitude to the Soviet Union, 1927-1935: An Overview with Specific Reference to Unemployment Policies and Peace', *JCH*, 22, 1 (1987), 71-90; Selby to Stamfordham (George V's private secretary), 1 Oct 1929, A. Henderson Papers, FO 800/280.

<sup>79</sup> Snowden (chancellor of the Exchequer) to A. Henderson, 2 May 1930, Henderson to Goschen, 19 Jun 1930, both A. Henderson Papers, FO 800/281.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, *Trading with the Bolsheviks*, 189-93; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, ch. 4.

to be successful.<sup>81</sup> The War Office, on the other hand, based on its intelligence assessments and the pro-Japanese sentiments of Major F. S. G. Piggott (successively military attaché in Tokyo and the head of MI2, the section of the War Office that dealt with foreign intelligence), believed that Britain needed to come to terms with Japan and that Tokyo could act as Britain's partner in opposing Bolshevism in the Far East.<sup>82</sup>

Similar differences existed between the Treasury and the Admiralty. Until 1926, the Admiralty had trumpeted Japan as the most likely naval threat to Britain, using Tokyo as the lever with which to extract monies for building programmes and for the construction of the Singapore naval base.<sup>83</sup> The Treasury did not accept this view. The controller of supply services, Sir George Barstow, described the idea of a Japanese attack on the British Empire as a 'lunatic's nightmare'.<sup>84</sup> This attitude persisted until the end of the decade and was shared by Churchill.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the Treasury believed that British interests would be best defended by improving Anglo-Japanese relations. These departmental differences ensured that, when the British attempted to define the role of Soviet Russia in Britain's strategic foreign policy in the Far East, there would be no easy consensus.

Much depended on British evaluations of Soviet intentions and capabilities. Determining either was not easy due to lack of information. At the beginning of the 1930s, the British decided to employ new methods to determine Soviet military strength. This took the form of industrial intelligence, a by-product of the British experience in the First World War.<sup>86</sup> When an Industrial Intelligence Committee (IIC) was set up by

<sup>81</sup> Best, *British Intelligence*, 66, 72.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–2, 97–9. MI2 dealt with intelligence matters at the WO; Carmen Blacker, 'Two Piggotts: Sir Francis Taylor Piggott (1852–1925) and Major General F. S. G. Piggott', in Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Gordon Daniels, eds., *Britain and Japan 1859–1991. Themes and Personalities* (London and New York, 1991), 118–27.

<sup>83</sup> Keith Neilson, 'Unbroken Thread: Japan and Britain and Imperial Defence, 1920–1932', in Greg Kennedy, ed., *British Naval Strategy East of Suez 1900–2000. Influences and Actions* (London and Portland, OR, 2005), 62–89.

<sup>84</sup> Untitled memo, Barstow, 26 Feb 1924, T 161/800/S18917/1.

<sup>85</sup> Tadashi Kuramatsu, 'Viscount Cecil, Winston Churchill and the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: *si vis pacem para pacem* versus *si vis pacem para bellum*', in T. G. Otte and Constantine A. Pagedas, eds., *Personalities, War and Diplomacy. Essays in International History* (London, 1997), 105–26; Kuramatsu, 'The Geneva Naval Conference of 1927: The British Preparation for the Conference, December 1926 to June 1927', *JSS*, 19, 1 (1996), 104–21; David MacGregor, 'Former Naval Cheapskate: Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy, 1924–1929', *Armed Forces and Society*, 19, 3 (1993), 319–34; Ian Hamil, 'Winston Churchill and the Singapore Naval Base, 1924–1929', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 11, 2 (1980), 277–86.

<sup>86</sup> Robert J. Young, 'Spokesmen for Economic Warfare: The Industrial Intelligence Centre in the 1930s', *ESR*, 6 (1976), 473–89.



the CID in 1930, Soviet Russia was chosen as its 'test case'.<sup>87</sup> By December 1930, the IIC had produced its first report. Its focus was the impact of the First Five-Year Plan on the Soviet capacity to make war. This report reflected the state of knowledge about both Soviet Russia's intentions and its military capabilities:

Recent events in and reports from the USSR make it clear that the Soviets look on war as inevitable, and regard it as possible in the not distant future . . . The 5 Years' Plan aims at making the USSR industrially self-supporting, not only in peace, but also in time of war.<sup>88</sup>

Here, the IIC had already proved its worth as an intelligence agency, and its conclusions have been echoed by modern scholarship.<sup>89</sup>

These were concerns for the future. In early 1931, the British were more concerned about disarmament. Here, the Soviets appeared to be taking a greater interest than previously.<sup>90</sup> This was significant, because, as was noted on 18 February at a meeting of the cross-bench Three-Party Disarmament Committee (set up to establish an united British position for the 1932 Disarmament Conference), Soviet Russia was an essential element in arms control. States bordering Soviet Russia were loath to enter into any arms limitation discussions that did not permit them to expand their forces, as they were 'very suspicious of Russia'.<sup>91</sup> And Soviet Russia justified its position by professing similar fears for its own security. Lord Robert Cecil, Britain's chief delegate at the arms control talks at Geneva, was still optimistic. Arguing that 'nobody but a lunatic' in the West now contemplated invading Soviet Russia, he contended that it 'might be worthwhile to try to convince the Russians, if they are honestly afraid, that fears of this kind are groundless'.<sup>92</sup> Others were

<sup>87</sup> Minutes, 1st meeting sub-committee on Industrial Intelligence, 20 Mar 1930, Cab 48/2.

<sup>88</sup> 'Report by the War Office on the trial scheme for the study of Industrial Intelligence in the USSR, carried out during the 6 months July-December, 1930', ns (but MI 3(c)), nd, but discussed at 3rd meeting IIC, 11 Mar 1931, Cab 48/2.

<sup>89</sup> Walter C. Clemens, Jr, 'The Burden of Defence: Soviet Russia in the 1920s', *JSMS*, 9, 4 (1996), 786-99; Simonov, '"Strengthen the Defence of the Land of Soviets"'; Slepyan, 'Limits of Mobilisation'; R. W. Davies, 'Soviet Military Expenditure and the Armaments Industry, 1929-1933: A Reconsideration', *E-AS*, 45, 4 (1993), 577-608; David R. Stone, 'Tukhachevsky in Leningrad: Military Politics and Exile, 1928-1931', *E-AS*, 48, 8 (1996), 1365-86; and Lennart Samuelson, *Plans for Stalin's War Machine. Tukhachevskii and Military-Economic Planning, 1925-1941* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 34-147.

<sup>90</sup> Untitled memo, Hugh Dalton's (parliamentary undersecretary, FO) conversation with Bogomoloff (Soviet *chargé d'affaires*), 15 Jan 1931, FO 371/15701/W589/47/98.

<sup>91</sup> DPC(31), minutes 2nd meeting, 18 Feb 1931, Cab 21/347; Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament 1919-1934* (London, 1999), 132-4.

<sup>92</sup> 'Note on the International Position of Disarmament', R. Cecil, Mar 1931, FO 371/15703/W2845/47/98, minutes, Cadogan (17 Mar) and Collier (19 Mar).



more doubtful. Cadogan contended that 'means will never be found of convincing' Soviet Russia's neighbours of the country's sincerity. Collier agreed, and pointed out that the states bordering Soviet Russia worried not only about defending themselves against direct Soviet aggression, but also about dealing with communist-inspired fifth columns. However, Cecil's memorandum, combined with the concerns found in Cadogan's and Collier's minutes, became the official Foreign Office position for the cross-bench Three-Party Disarmament Committee.<sup>93</sup>

Austen Chamberlain raised the issue of Soviet Russia in the latter.<sup>94</sup> He wished to know the 'anticipated attitude' of Moscow at the forthcoming Disarmament Conference and whether Germany and Soviet Russia were collaborating on manufacturing arms. The answers reflected beliefs about Soviet Russia. The CIGS replied that the 'suspicion of the Soviet leaders towards capitalist States and the belief that the latter's intentions are to intervene by force in the USSR . . . [have] recently caused the Soviet leaders to concentrate first and foremost on military industries'.<sup>95</sup> The CIGS, in fact, termed Soviet Russia 'the great enigma and the great obstacle to any general scheme for the limitation and reduction of armaments'.<sup>96</sup> This dovetailed with the views of Vansittart, who outlined Soviet Russia's threat to disarmament in the second of his so-called Old Adam memoranda. Having been brain-washed by propaganda as to the threatening attitude of the external world,

Soon no Russian will have heard anything else. He believes in ogres, magic formulae, *si vis pacem para bellum*, and the whole outfit of wicked-fairy stories. The consequence of perpetually howling wolf is *not* indifference among neighbours but lycanthropy at home. On such a mentality pacific professions would be wasted, even if they got there: the Soviets never doubt what Europe says, they just don't believe a word of it.<sup>97</sup>

Very similar views were provided by the Foreign Office in June.<sup>98</sup> As a result, when that committee ceased deliberating in the summer of 1931,

<sup>93</sup> 'The Soviet Union and Disarmament', FO, 7 Apr 1931 and correspondence, Cab 21/346.

<sup>94</sup> DC(P), minutes 2nd meeting, 23 Apr 1931, Cab 16/102.

<sup>95</sup> DC(P), minutes 3rd meeting, 7 May 1931, Cab 16/102; 'Note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in Answer to Sir Austen Chamberlain's Question on the Military Character of the Soviet Five Year Plan', Milne (CIGS), 5 May 1931, Cab 16/102.

<sup>96</sup> 'Military Appreciation of the Situation in Europe, March, 1931', CID B-1046, Sir G. Milne, 31 Mar 1931, Cab 4/21.

<sup>97</sup> 'An Aspect of International Relations in 1931', Vansittart, 14 May 1931, CP 125(31), Cab 24/221; the original is in FO 371/15205/C3217/3217/62. 'Old Adam' refers to militarism.

<sup>98</sup> 'The Foreign Policy of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom', DC(P) 35, FO, 2 Jun 1931, confidential, Cab 16/102.

it had been fully apprised of the opinion held of Soviet Russia by both the Foreign Office and the service ministries.

In fact, while the committee sat, the service ministries had been considering possible actions against Russian incursions in the Perso-Iraq region.<sup>99</sup> In March, the COS decided that the JPC should undertake further study of this matter.<sup>100</sup> When that was done, however, the RN found its views 'so divergent' from those of the other two services that a full examination of the topic was requested.<sup>101</sup> The RN's objections had a historical bent; it saw in these disputed plans the roots of a campaign that 'bear[s] an unfortunate resemblance to the Mesopotamia campaign of the late war'.<sup>102</sup> The director of plans at the Admiralty argued at length against the JPC's ideas, but the entire matter was deferred until late November. At that time, the chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Sir John Salmond, insisted that the issue be resolved.<sup>103</sup> The result was a meeting of the JPC on 10 December.<sup>104</sup> At it, the RN objected to the plans of the other two services, plans based on seizing an advanced base in Persia. The RN preferred a more limited defence of the Persian oil fields. A deadlock ensued. Nothing further was done until March 1933, when it was decided that an entirely new examination of the matter should be undertaken.<sup>105</sup>

In the interim, a close eye was kept on Soviet Russia. The focus was on Soviet industrialization for war.<sup>106</sup> Despite Soviet attempts to import technology from abroad and clear evidence of progress in the Soviet munitions industries, there was scepticism at the IIC that this would lead to immediate results. The War Office contended 'that this does not mean that in a few years' time, and increasingly as the years go on, the preparedness of the USSR for unlimited war provided by these preparations will constitute a gigantic menace to the peace of mind of Europe and of Asia'. The Admiralty was blunt as to Soviet intentions: 'The

<sup>99</sup> Minutes, 99th meeting COS, 19 Mar 1931, Cab 53/3.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Admiral F. L. Field (CNS) to Hankey, 23 Jul 1931, Cab 21/370; 'Plan for Subsidiary Operations Against Russia in the Perso-Iraq Area', DMO&I (WO) and DOI (Air Ministry), 11 Dec 1930, Cab 53/22.

<sup>102</sup> J. H. D. Cunningham (director of plans, Adm) to secretary Joint Planning Sub-Committee, 18 Jul 1931, Cab 21/370.

<sup>103</sup> Salmond to Hankey, 26 Nov 1931, and correspondence, all Cab 21/370.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes, 48th meeting JPC, 10 Dec 1931, Cab 55/1.

<sup>105</sup> Commander C. C. Allen (RN, secretary to the CID) to Capt. H. R. Moore (Adm), 1 March 1933, and correspondence, Cab 21/370.

<sup>106</sup> 'Industrial Mobilisation in the USSR', FCI 14, secret, IIC, 13 Jan 1932; 'Secret Task of Engineer Smirnov in Germany', FCI 15, IIC, 8 Feb 1932; untitled comments on FCI 14 and 15 by the service departments, 20 Apr 1932, all Cab 48/3; discussed at 7th meeting FCI, 27 Apr 1932, Cab 48/2.

constant [Soviet] talk of organisation for defence is ridiculous and is only used to hoodwink their own nationals, it is unlikely to take in anybody else.' As a result, it was decided to ask the CID to consider how to deal with any Soviet attempts to obtain technical aid from British firms.<sup>107</sup> At the CID on 9 June and again on 8 November, it was agreed that no Soviet technicians should be allowed to work in Britain anywhere they would have access to sensitive material and that British firms should inform the government of any technical exchanges with the USSR.<sup>108</sup>

Just what were Soviet intentions and capabilities was considered carefully in 1932. This resulted from an inquiry by the Afghan government.<sup>109</sup> Vansittart contended that the Afghans could be assured that the Soviet 'internal situation' and 'preoccupation in the Far East' precluded any immediate threat to Kabul, but felt that only 'soothing syrup' could be given as to what the likely British response would be. The British minister to Afghanistan, Sir Richard Maconachie, came to London on leave in June, and was given a fuller, if similar answer. The CID's conclusion of January 1928 that, if Soviet Russia were to attack Afghanistan, such an action would constitute a *casus belli* remained officially British policy; however, 'in view of changed conditions since that decision was taken, our policy in this respect may have altered'.<sup>110</sup>

This needed clarification. No one at the Foreign Office felt it wise to inform the Afghans that Britain would defend them, as to do so would be 'almost a definite commitment' to Kabul.<sup>111</sup> Instead, the India Office and the government of India were consulted. The reply underlined the awkward nature of the Afghan request. Kabul needed an answer to encourage it to resist the 'bullying methods' of Soviet Russia, but a definite promise of military support could not be given without a complete re-examination of regional defence matters, something which was not to occur until 1933.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> 'Proposals Regarding Technical Aid Contracts with the USSR', CID 1092-B, E. F. Crowe (chairman, Sub-Committee on Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries), 7 Jun 1932, Cab 4/21.

<sup>108</sup> Minutes, 256th meeting CID, 9 Jun 1932 and minutes, 257th meeting CID, 8 Nov 1932, both Cab 2/5.

<sup>109</sup> R. Maconachie (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, Kabul) to FO, disp 48, 31 Mar 1932, FO 371/16277/713/N2579/73/97.

<sup>110</sup> 'Memorandum Respecting Russo-Afghan Relations', Greenway (nd), 10 Jun 1932, FO 371/16277/N3544/713/97; 'Memorandum', Greenway, 8 Jun 1932, FO 371/16323/N3498/39/38.

<sup>111</sup> Minutes, Collier (11 Jul 1932), Seymour (12 Jul 1932), Oliphant (14 Jul 1932) and Vansittart (14 Jul 1932), all FO 371/16277/N3923/713/97.

<sup>112</sup> The minutes, FO 371/16278/N5252/713/97, esp. Collier (21 Sept 1932) and Simon (20 Sept 1932); quotation from J. C. Walton (assistant secretary, IO), minute, 15 Sept 1932.

In the meantime, an anodyne draft reply suggested that Afghanistan join the League as part of its means to deal with Soviet Russia. Sir John Simon, the foreign secretary, noted that suggesting Afghanistan join the League, while warning that the League was unlikely to be able to give effective assistance, would probably lead only to the Afghans coming to terms with Soviet Russia. This was characteristically clever, but provided no practical solution. Simon added nothing about Britain's own willingness to defend Afghanistan. The matter went to the Cabinet. After some careful modifications, Afghanistan was promised support, but the nature of what Soviet action would trigger assistance was left vague.<sup>113</sup> However, the debate about Afghanistan had revealed several assumptions that underpinned British policy towards Soviet Russia in late 1932: Soviet Russia could attack Afghanistan with relative impunity, but was unlikely to do so due to both its domestic situation and the situation in the Far East. However, any definitive determination of British strategic defence policy with respect to Soviet Russia generally would have to await fuller examination.

Before considering this, the changes in the policy making élite that occurred in 1931 need examination. The collapse of the Labour government and the coming to power of a National Government brought new men to power.<sup>114</sup> While Ramsay MacDonald remained prime minister, other key positions had fresh occupants. These new men were particularly important, for their views helped determine British strategic foreign policy. And it was not only their views of Soviet Russia that were significant. Because the major British concern when these men came to office was the Far East, their views regarding Japan and the United States – the other two major Powers in the region along with Britain and Soviet Russia – are central to any understanding of how Soviet Russia affected British strategic foreign policy.

Henderson was replaced at the Foreign Office by Sir John Simon. Simon had no particular credentials for the office other than the fact that he had spent 1929–30 as the chairman of a commission set up to report

<sup>113</sup> Minutes, FO 371/16278/N5891/713/97; minutes, Cab 50(32), 11 Oct 1932, Cab 23/72; 'Question of the Reply to be given . . . if the Soviet attacked Afghanistan', CP 300 (32), Hoare and Simon, 3 Oct 1932, Cab 24/232.

<sup>114</sup> David J. Wrench, "'Cashing In": The Parties and the National Government, August 1931–September 1932', *JBS*, 23, 2 (1984), 135–53; Stuart Ball, 'The Conservative Party and the Formation of the National Government: August 1931', *HJ*, 29, 1 (1985), 159–82; Andrew Thorpe, 'Arthur Henderson and the British Political Crisis of 1931', *HJ*, 31, 1 (1988), 117–39; Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government. British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926–1932* (Cambridge, 1992); and Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party. The Crisis of 1929–1931* (New Haven, 1988).

on the political future of India.<sup>115</sup> Of much greater import was the fact that he was the leader of the faction of the Liberals that had agreed to support the idea of a National Government.<sup>116</sup> When he took office in November, Simon had no discernible views on Soviet Russia, although it is likely that he shared the pre-1914 Liberal antipathy towards tsarist Russia. A member of the last Liberal government, he had threatened resignation (but had not carried through) over declaring war in 1914, but had left the government over conscription in 1915, displaying a lack of firm purpose that was to characterize his time as foreign secretary.

Indeed, Simon was not held in high regard either by his subordinates at the Foreign Office, in the civil service generally or by his Cabinet colleagues. This was particularly true with respect to British disarmament policy. Cadogan felt that Simon was the only person in the Cabinet 'bored' with disarmament, while Sir John Pratt, the Foreign Office's leading expert on China who worked closely with Simon at Geneva in 1932, believed that the foreign secretary's 'main trouble is inordinate vanity and [that] he cannot do anything unless half a dozen people are standing and applauding'.<sup>117</sup> E. H. Carr, a member of the Foreign Office's Geneva contingent, believed that Simon, 'this completely amoral S. of S.', was largely to blame for not overcoming the inertia at the Disarmament Conference.<sup>118</sup>

Such attitudes were not just confined to the Foreign Office. In September 1932, one of the secretaries to the CID, E. J. Hodsoll, believed that the foreign secretary, 'in his heart of hearts', would have preferred that the Disarmament Conference at Geneva come to an end.<sup>119</sup> Hodsoll also found it difficult to get Simon to settle down to work, a trait that Hankey, too, had observed. Simon's Cabinet colleagues were unimpressed by his efforts. MacDonald thought that 'Simon's lack of wide & systematised outlook lost him the initiative & placed him under the influence of every current' at Geneva, while Neville Chamberlain found Simon in 'despair' and lacking in ideas.<sup>120</sup> While some held

<sup>115</sup> David Dutton, *Simon. A Political Biography of Sir John Simon* (London, 1992); for Simon's Indian efforts, see 82–100.

<sup>116</sup> Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government*, 354–5, 394, 434–5, 486.

<sup>117</sup> Cadogan to Eden, 14 Jan 1932, Avon Papers 14/1/153; Pratt to his wife, 5 Mar 1932, Pratt Papers, PPMS 5/53; diary entry, 10 Jun 1932, Leeper Papers, LEEP 1/15; David Dutton, 'Simon and Eden at the Foreign Office', *RIS*, 20 (1995), 35–52; Michael Hughes, 'The Foreign Secretary Goes to Court: John Simon and His Critics', *TCBH*, 14, 4 (2003), 339–59.

<sup>118</sup> E. H. Carr to Strang, 23 Sept 1932, Strang Papers, STRN 4/6.

<sup>119</sup> E. J. Hodsoll to Hankey, 19 Sept 1932, Cab 21/354, and Hankey's marginalia.

<sup>120</sup> Diary entry, 30 Oct 1932, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/1; N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 30 Oct 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/803.

MacDonald responsible for this state of affairs, it was evident that the foreign secretary was not viewed as an effective force with respect to disarmament.<sup>121</sup>

A potentially even greater problem for British strategic foreign policy and Soviet Russia was Simon's approach to the Far East. During Simon's tenure in office, there was constant tension between Tokyo and Moscow. A key element in determining British policy in the region was the United States. This meant that all policy decisions were embedded in a complicated matrix consisting of London, Moscow, Tokyo and Washington. On 7 January 1932, the American secretary of state, Henry L. Stimson, issued the so-called Stimson Doctrine of 'non-recognition'. In it, the United States refused to recognize any changes in the *status quo* in China resulting from Japan's aggression and called on the British to do likewise.<sup>122</sup> Simon was unwilling. He was trying to walk a fine line.<sup>123</sup> He believed that Japan was pursuing an aggressive, 'ambitious' plan and wanted to check it, but did not wish to give the Chinese *carte blanche* to instigate trouble between London and Tokyo. Equally, he wanted to act in concert with the League, a complication that the Americans did not need to consider. He thus preferred to make representations to both the Japanese and the Chinese in an attempt to end the crisis. American policy complicated matters, and Simon had no faith that the Stimson Doctrine had any teeth. 'The Japs will no doubt regard us as opposing their plans', Simon told MacDonald on 29 January 1932, 'and we have to remember that though America expresses great surprise if we do not act with them on these occasions, if we do, they will leave us with the brunt of the work and of the blame.' While this assessment may have been true, Simon's refusal to join with the Americans was badly received in Washington.<sup>124</sup> As Robert Cecil wrote to Stanley Baldwin, now Lord President of the Council, late in 1932, Simon 'seems to have given everybody the idea that he was a thick and thin supporter of Japan . . . The only explanation which any foreigner will accept of it [British policy in the Far East] is either that we have some corrupt bargain with Japan, or else that we are so afraid of her that we dare not say anything she dislikes.'<sup>125</sup> This was unfortunate. American suspicions of Simon (and, indeed, of British policy generally in the Far East even after he left

<sup>121</sup> Diary entry, 31 Oct 1932, Leeper Papers, LEEP 1/15.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy. The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933* (New York, 1972), 192-9, 210-11.

<sup>123</sup> Simon to MacDonald, 29 Jan 1932, Prem 1/116.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes, 2nd meeting Cabinet Committee on the Far East, CJC(32), 15 Feb 1932, Cab 27/482; Thorne, *Limits of Foreign Policy*, 247-69.

<sup>125</sup> Cecil to Baldwin, 12 Dec 1932, Baldwin Papers 118.

office) affected what Britain could do in that region. Of particular importance was the fact that uncertain Anglo-American relations reacted upon British policy with respect to Soviet Russia in the Far East.

Simon was not the only newcomer who made strategic foreign policy in the National Government. Neville Chamberlain, the chancellor of the Exchequer, proved highly influential, despite his relative lack of experience in foreign affairs. Chamberlain's ministerial career had been limited. During the war, he served as director of National Service for almost exactly a year, but incurred the wrath of Lloyd George and was forced to resign in 1917, regarded as a failure.<sup>126</sup> He was briefly chancellor of the Exchequer in Baldwin's first government and a success as minister of health in Baldwin's second term. While Austen Chamberlain may have been somewhat flippant when he told his brother that 'Neville, you must remember you don't know anything about foreign affairs', there was more than a kernel of truth in that statement. When Neville became chancellor, he had a chance to confirm it.<sup>127</sup>

Chamberlain got his baptism in foreign affairs while chancellor in two ways. The first was in the inter-departmental discussions over budgets, particularly those with respect to the Admiralty's building programmes. The second was in the complex economic diplomacy that was such a feature of post-1918 international affairs.<sup>128</sup> In both of these arenas, Chamberlain developed ideas (and prejudices) that were to determine his views on foreign affairs subsequently. The two influences on Chamberlain require some examination, as each played on British strategic foreign policy and Soviet Russia.

As noted above, the RN's building programmes in the 1920s were constantly challenged by the Treasury. As chancellor, Neville Chamberlain was quick to pick up on this theme, and he became an ardent advocate of improving relations with Japan to solve Britain's

<sup>126</sup> Robert Self, ed., *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters, I, The Making of a Politician, 1915–1920* (3 vols.; Aldershot, 2000), 1–92; David Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain, vol. I, Pioneering and Reform, 1869–1929* (Cambridge, 1984); Dilks, "‘We Must Hope for the Best and Prepare for the Worst’: The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937–1939", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 78 (1987), 309–52; Keith Grievies, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914–1918* (Manchester, 1988), 134–7; and Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946).

<sup>127</sup> Self, *Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*, 27–8.

<sup>128</sup> Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction*; Robert W. D. Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads. A Study in Politics, Economics and International Relations* (Cambridge, 1987); Bruce Kent, *The Spoils of War. The Politics, Economics and Diplomacy of Reparations, 1918–1922* (Oxford, 1989); Arthur Turner, *The Cost of War. British Policy on French War Debts, 1918–1932* (Brighton and Portland, OR, 1998); and Andrew Williams, 'Sir John Bradbury and the Reparations Commission, 1920–1925', *D&S*, 13, 3 (2002), 81–102.



strategic difficulties in the Far East. Since Soviet Russia was Japan's mortal enemy in the Far East, Anglo-Japanese relations were intimately tied to Anglo-Soviet relations. Chamberlain's advocacy of improved Anglo-Japanese relations put him at odds with the Foreign Office, which came to believe, particularly by the end of 1932, that Japan could not be propitiated in any fashion commensurate with British interests. Chamberlain's contentions had consequences for Britain's relations with other states. Close Anglo-Japanese relations might encourage Japan to encroach upon Soviet Russia's position in the Far East, preoccupying Moscow and preventing it from being able to respond to any German aggression in Europe. Equally, it made close Anglo-American relations more difficult, since the United States, as Stimson had made clear, opposed Japan's aggressive actions in China. This latter complication played into the second influence on Chamberlain's views on foreign policy: international finance.

Here, too, the attitude of the United States was significant. War debts affected all attempts to stabilize the international economy, and the Americans were the determining factor in this matter.<sup>129</sup> In the early summer of 1932, Chamberlain received his baptism of fire in international gatherings at the Lausanne economic conference. There he discovered – 'this has been an education for me in the ways of the foreigner' – that not everyone was like him.<sup>130</sup> He also found that the Americans were unlikely to agree to a cancellation of payments on the British war debt.<sup>131</sup> By late 1932, he was completely antagonistic towards Washington; the American attitude was 'hopelessly unresponsive', and that country had 'let us down as usual' in the negotiations.<sup>132</sup> Chamberlain shared a belief, widespread in the Treasury, that the Americans, due to domestic considerations, would avoid the issue of war debts as much as possible, without considering the international implications.<sup>133</sup> Chamberlain also blamed the collapse of the World Economic Conference in July 1933 on the Americans, arguing that the new American president, Franklin Roosevelt, had 'torpedoed' the proceedings.<sup>134</sup> Chamberlain was contemptuous towards Roosevelt.

<sup>129</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Failure of Economic Diplomacy. Britain, Germany, France and the United States, 1931–1936* (London, 1996).

<sup>130</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 26 Jun 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 1/18/789.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; his letter to his sister Ida, 20 Jun 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/788.

<sup>132</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister Ida, 19 Nov 1932, and to his sister, Hilda, 10 Dec 1932, both Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/806, 809.

<sup>133</sup> Leith-Ross to Warren Fisher and N. Chamberlain, 30 Dec 1932, Leith Ross Papers, T 188/58; Vansittart to Warren Fisher, 16 Dec 1932, *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 10 Jul 1933, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/835; Hankey to his wife, 4 and 5 Jul 1933, Hankey Papers, HNKY 3/40, and diary entry, 10 Jul 1933, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/1.



The chancellor dismissed the American's economic innovations, telling the Cabinet that Roosevelt was a sort of 'medicine man' who produced various kinds of 'Mumbo Jumbo' to satisfy his constituents.<sup>135</sup>

Chamberlain's belief that Roosevelt was flighty in his approach to affairs coloured the chancellor's relations with the president. All of this was highly significant for Anglo-Soviet matters. Chamberlain's dislike of the United States, combined with his belief in the need for an Anglo-Japanese settlement in the Far East, meant that British policy in that region would hover uneasily between co-operation with Tokyo and co-operation with Washington. This gave greater weight to considerations of Soviet Russia than would otherwise have been the case.

As to Soviet Russia itself, Chamberlain had no fixed views when he took office, although he shared the general antipathy towards the Bolshevik regime within the Conservative Party. As a member of Baldwin's second government, Chamberlain had experienced his brother's difficulties with Moscow, complaining in February 1927 about Soviet Russia's 'burrowing and undermining'.<sup>136</sup> In fact, Neville had helped Austen draft the latter's protest note to Soviet Russia of 23 February. But this was second-hand dealing with Moscow. When he became chancellor, events soon gave Neville ample opportunity to form first-hand opinions. This was due to the Temporary Commercial Agreement with Soviet Russia.<sup>137</sup> This proved no more satisfactory than the earlier trade agreement, with the Soviets running a large trade surplus. In January 1932, the Cabinet created a committee to deal with this issue, with Chamberlain as chairman.<sup>138</sup> No inter-departmental consensus could be reached, and the entire matter became entangled in the Ottawa Conference, held in the summer of 1932 to establish a system of imperial preferences.<sup>139</sup>

The British decided to abrogate the Temporary Commercial Agreement. The Soviets responded by harassing the British embassy. This

<sup>135</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 28 Oct 1933, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/848.

<sup>136</sup> Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 19 Feb 1927, in Self, *Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. II, *The Reform Years, 1921–1927*, 394.

<sup>137</sup> Keith Neilson, 'A Cautionary Tale: The Metro-Vickers Incident of 1933', in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., *Incidents and International Relations. People, Power and Personalities* (Westport, CT, 2002), 87–112.

<sup>138</sup> Minutes, Cab 9(32), 27 Jan 1932, Cab 23/70. The minutes of the Cabinet Committee on Trade with Russia are in Cab 27/480.

<sup>139</sup> Untitled memo by S. D. Waley (Treasury), 25 April, T 160/423/F10070/01/3; Andrew J. Williams, 'Canada and Anglo-Soviet Relations: The Question of Russian Trade at the 1932 Ottawa Imperial Conference', *D&S*, 1, 2 (1990), 185–215; Robert Self, 'Neville Chamberlain and the British World: Anglo-Dominion Relations and the Limits of "Britishness" Between the Wars', unpublished paper delivered at the British World II Conference, Calgary, 10 July 2003.

culminated on 12 March 1933 with the arrest (discussed below, 79–80) of a number of British engineers employed in Soviet Russia by Metro-Vickers.<sup>140</sup> During the period from January 1932 to the Metro-Vickers arrests, Chamberlain formed his view of the Soviets. Economically, he was convinced that the First Five-Year Plan had been a failure and that Soviet Russia was near a financial collapse.<sup>141</sup> And, while he claimed that he did not share the view that Russia was ‘an unclean thing which we must not touch’, Chamberlain did make it clear to the new Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky, that it was difficult giving credits to ‘the most unfriendly country in the world’.<sup>142</sup> However, Chamberlain was willing to discuss matters with Maisky, but the chancellor’s emphasis on the purely trade aspects of the Anglo-Soviet dispute drew fire at the Foreign Office, which saw the abrogation as part of a wider trial of strength between the two countries. Chamberlain’s inexperience in foreign policy made him oblivious to this aspect.<sup>143</sup> None the less, the trade talks with Soviet Russia, and particularly the enormous public furore generated by the Metro-Vickers episode in March, left Chamberlain with the impression that the Soviets were beyond the pale of European civilization, both difficult and shift in negotiations.<sup>144</sup> It also made him sensitive to the possible parliamentary difficulties that dealings with Soviet Russia could engender. Finally, he came to dislike Ivan Maisky.<sup>145</sup>

All of these early impressions about foreign relations – his preference for a compromise with Japan, his dislike of the United States and Roosevelt and his low opinion of Soviet Russia – would not have been important had Chamberlain modified them over time. He did not. Chamberlain was a stubborn, arrogant man, generally contemptuous of opinions that did not agree with his own and dismissive of his Cabinet colleagues when they did not share his views. He was an old man in a hurry, quite conscious of the fact that he had to make a success of his chancellorship or face political marginalization.<sup>146</sup> His approach to any problem, according to someone who worked closely with him, was to look

<sup>140</sup> Neilson, ‘Cautionary Tale’; Gordon W. Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution. Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1995).

<sup>141</sup> S. D. Waley (Treasury) to Picton Bagge (DOT), 7 Jan 1932, T 160/791/F7436/6.

<sup>142</sup> Quotations from, respectively, N. Chamberlain to Arthur Chamberlain, 24 Oct 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 7/6/4 and Chamberlain’s untitled memo of a conversation with Maisky, 16 Nov 1932, Prem 1/138.

<sup>143</sup> Minutes (19 and 20 Nov 1932) in FO 371/16321/N6619/22/38; N. Chamberlain’s minute on Vansittart’s letter, 23 Nov 1932, T 172/1792.

<sup>144</sup> Ovey’s testimony to ‘Committee on Anglo-Soviet Relations . . .’, SRC(33), ns, 3 Apr 1933, Cab 27/550.

<sup>145</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 19 Nov 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/806.

<sup>146</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 3 Jan 1932, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/766; Greg Kennedy, ‘“Rat in Power”: Neville Chamberlain and the Creation of British

at it in a clear sighted, direct way, determined to get all the factors in proper order and in due perspective. In a methodical matter-of-fact way, keeping his feet on the ground and avoiding wishful thinking, he would form a judgment upon the facts and, having formed that judgment, felt so far confident about its rightness as to be able and determined to follow it by action.<sup>147</sup>

Had Chamberlain been capable of seeing the complexity of the situations which confronted him and of changing his plans accordingly, these would have been admirable traits. However, he was not.

His attempts to 'straighten things out' that 'offended his sense of orderliness' in foreign affairs meant that he characterized those (particularly at the Foreign Office) who pointed out that the problems were too complex and interconnected to admit of simplistic solutions as either advocates of drift or obstructionist. Chamberlain stubbornly pursued a particular line of policy (even after it generated untoward consequences) and ignored other approaches that did not fit into his preconceived notions. This was particularly dangerous with respect to Soviet Russia. The latter was an unknown force, whose intentions and inclinations were unclear. Moscow occupied a fluid position in British planning, and it required a flexible and comprehensive mind to understand the manifold ways in which it affected the British position. While the threats posed by Germany and Japan were manifest, Soviet Russia's impact on British policy was not. Such ambiguity was alien to Chamberlain. The results were not favourable.

As these new men came to power, they faced the beginning of the end of the relative calm of the 'period of persuasion'. Japan's actions in Manchuria in September 1931 escalated into a threat to the British position at Shanghai by January 1932.<sup>148</sup> The League of Nations sent a commission, under Lord Lytton, to investigate matters. Until the Lytton commission reported, how should Britain respond and how would this affect Anglo-Soviet relations? The centre of discussion was whether Japan and Soviet Russia would come to blows in the region. As early as January 1932, the British had noted Soviet attempts to sign a non-aggression pact with Japan in order to ensure that Tokyo's actions in

Foreign Policy, 1931–1939' in Thomas Otte, ed., *The Makers of British Foreign Policy. From Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 173–89; Greg Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the US During His Chancellorship', *D&S*, 13, 1(2002), 95–120.

<sup>147</sup> Quotations from 'Munich 1938', Horace Wilson, October 1941, Wilson Papers, Cab 127/158.

<sup>148</sup> Christopher Thorne, 'The Shanghai Crisis of 1932: The Basis of British Policy', *AHR*, 75, 6 (1970), 1616–39; Thorne, *Limits of Foreign Policy*, 204–72; Ian H. Nish, *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism. Japan, China and the League of Nations, 1931–1933* (London, 1993), 90–106.

China did not lead to a conflict with Moscow. These efforts were repeated in May, despite (perhaps because of) the ongoing series of border incidents between the two countries.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, however, Soviet troops were being sent to the Far East and efforts to improve the country's general war-readiness were being increased.<sup>150</sup> This aside, by August, there were signs that Soviet–Japanese relations were improving, a fact that both the Foreign Office and the War Office attributed to neither side's wanting a war at the time.<sup>151</sup>

At the War Office, there were divided counsels about what this implied for British policy. The head of MI2, Colonel A. G. C. Dawney, argued that British interests required Tokyo to establish, 'in an orderly Manchuria, an effective barrier against the unrestricted spread of either Russian or Chinese communism in the Far East'.<sup>152</sup> To this end, he advocated giving Japan 'at least the sympathy due to an old ally and an established friend', and 'avoiding at all costs being drawn into action which would range us openly among her opponents'. He contended that to do otherwise would draw Japan's 'covetous eyes southward towards the vacant spaces of Australia' and endanger 'our wide and vulnerable interests' in the Far East.

The deputy director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DDMO&I), A. C. Temperley, pointed out the political difficulties. First, to support Japan would require the British to vote against the Lytton Report, with its attendant negative impact on public opinion. Second, to recognize the Japanese move as legitimate would undercut any subsequent attempts to condemn other Powers for similar actions elsewhere. Third, to act in such a fashion would alienate the United States – and an 'understanding with the USA has been for years the keynote of British policy' – at a particularly delicate time, as the war debts issue was coming to a head. Temperley, too, wished to get on better terms with Japan, but he felt that nothing could be done until the inevitable furore that the Lytton Report would create had died down.

<sup>149</sup> Lindley to FO, tel 21, 18 Jan 1932, FO 371/16246/F369/369/23; Lindley to FO, disp 47 confidential, 25 Jan 1932, FO 371/16153/F1844/1/10; Lindley to FO, disp 285, 28 May 1932, FO 371/16246/F5045/369/23; Ingram (*chargé d'affaires*, Peking) to FO, disp 634, 1 Jun 1932, FO 371/16175/F6069/1/10.

<sup>150</sup> Ovey to FO, disp 318, 21 Jun 1932, FO 371/16334/N3841/1089/38; 'The Munitions Industry', ICF 313, ns, 20 May 1932, Cab 21/395; Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–1933. The Impact of the Depression* (New York, 1983), 83–97.

<sup>151</sup> 'Far East', W. H. Bartholomew (DMO&I, WO), 8 Sept 1932, WO 106/5395; Lindley to FO, disp 330, 24 Aug 1932, FO 371/16245/F6350/348/23.

<sup>152</sup> This and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on Untitled memo, Dawney, 9 Sept 1932, minutes, Temperley, 23 Sept 1932, and Maj.-Gen. W. H. Bartholomew (DMO&I), all WO 106/5397.

This position was shared up the chain of command; thus, Dawnay's opinion was unlikely to be implemented as policy.<sup>153</sup>

This was evident at the Foreign Office. There, discussion tended to accept Dawnay's contentions about the need not to offend Japan unnecessarily, but laid emphasis on Temperley's concerns. Simon decreed that British policy must take into consideration the need to '(1) be faithful to the League & act with the main body if possible (2) to not take the lead in an attitude which, while necessarily futile, will antagonise Japan seriously (3) be fair to both China & Japan (4) work to keep Japan in the League'.<sup>154</sup> Like many of Simon's pronouncements, this embodied a comprehensive and balanced position. How it was to be achieved, however, was left unstated.

In the meanwhile, as the Lytton Report made its slow passage from Peking to Geneva, reassuring reports reached the Foreign Office about an improvement in Russo-Japanese relations. From Moscow, William Strang, the British *chargé d'affaires*, gave three possible explanations for this: an increase in Russian military strength in the Far East, a Soviet belief that a Japanese attack was no longer imminent and an awareness in Moscow that the Chinese Eastern Railway was a financial liability and thus something that could be given up. In Tokyo, Sir Francis Lindley, the British ambassador, argued that a Soviet-Japanese war was now 'extremely improbable at the present time for the simple reason that neither country desires it'.<sup>155</sup>

This optimism did not last. When the Lytton Report reached Geneva in early October 1932, the Japanese rejected its conclusions. The British hoped to work out some sort of conciliation between Japan and China, but, in the short term, they wished to avoid taking the lead in condemning Japan at Geneva in order not to antagonize it unnecessarily, while trying, in Simon's words, 'to keep in touch and in line with the US'.<sup>156</sup> But it was also important to keep an eye on Soviet policy. Doing so was complicated by the British abrogation of the Temporary Commercial Agreement with Soviet Russia on 17 October. This action meant that any possible co-operation with the Soviets in the Far East would

<sup>153</sup> 'The Situation in the Far East', MI 2(c), 20 Oct 1932, WO 106/5395.

<sup>154</sup> Minutes, C. W. Orde (head, FED), 13 Sept, and Simon, 17 Sept, on Lindley to FO, tel 351, 12 Sept 1932, FO 371/16177/F6664/1/10.

<sup>155</sup> Strang (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, disp 546, 27 Sept 1932, FO 371/16324/N5605/40/38; Lindley to FO, disp 452, 21 Aug 1932, FO 371/16246/F7126/369/23.

<sup>156</sup> Minutes, Simon (7 Oct) and Vansittart (5 Oct) on Lindley to FO, disp 448, immediate, 30 Aug 1932, FO 371/16178/F7163/1/10; minutes, Mounsey (4 Oct) and Vansittart (5 Oct) on two untitled FO memos, 26 Sept 1932, FO 371/16179/F7421/1/10.

take place in a charged atmosphere, as Moscow was convinced that the abrogation had political, not commercial motives.<sup>157</sup>

None the less, the Soviet reaction to the Japanese recognition of an independent Manchukuo was central to the determination of Britain's own policy. Moscow's initial policy was cautious. The British suspected that Moscow wanted a deal: it would recognize Manchukuo in exchange for an agreement that the latter would not 'expand westwards'. Such an exchange, Mounsey contended, would 'be worth Japan's while' to accept.<sup>158</sup> Soviet reluctance to force the issue was clear. On 13 October, Karl Radek, a prominent party member and head of Stalin's foreign secretariat, published an article outlining the Soviet view of the Lytton Report. To Sir Esmond Ovey, the British ambassador at Moscow, Radek's article made Soviet views and policy manifest:

They regard the Japanese as guilty of a flagrant act of imperialist aggression. They are not themselves prepared to take positive action against Japan's act of aggression, and are not likely to be drawn into hostilities against Japan unless Japanese aggression should culminate in a threat to Soviet territory itself. Nor are they prepared to make common cause, diplomatic or military, with other Powers in resistance to Japanese action.<sup>159</sup>

Instead, Ovey argued that Soviet Russia would mark time and rely upon China's own resistance to Japan's actions.

The direction of Soviet policy was a matter of debate at the Foreign Office, especially in light of a proposal by Sir Eric Drummond, the secretary of the League of Nations and a former British diplomatist, to get Soviet Russia to participate in the discussions of the Manchurian question at Geneva. There was a variety of British feelings about Moscow's policy. Sir John Pratt, whose long experience in the consular service in China and acknowledged expertise concerning that country meant that he 'really ran our relations with China', picked up on Ovey's remarks.<sup>160</sup> Pratt contended that 'Russia's immediate aim is to safeguard her economic interests in Manchuria, [but] her ultimate aim is to spread

<sup>157</sup> Ovey to FO, tel 166, 22 Oct 1932, FO 371/16320/N6015/22/38; untitled memo, conversation between Ramsay MacDonald and Maisky, 15 Nov 1932, Prem 1/138; for Franco-Soviet trade, see Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–1933*, 38–45. The belligerent Soviet attitude was likely due to concerns that the British were aware of Soviet intelligence-gathering actions against London: Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive. The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 2000), 63.

<sup>158</sup> Lindley to FO, disp 501, 17 Sept 1932, FO 371/16179/F7406/1/10; Lindley to FO, tel 378, 19 Oct 1932, FO 371/16179/F7491/1/10, minutes, Orde (20 Oct) and Mounsey (20 Oct).

<sup>159</sup> Ovey to FO, disp 604, 25 Oct 1932, FO 371/16180/F7664/1/10.

<sup>160</sup> Frank Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators. The Destruction and Revival of Europe 1930–1970* (London, 1991), 6.

the Soviet system in the Far East.' To this end, he felt that Soviet Russia would reach an agreement with Japan and Manchukuo, let Japan dig 'her own grave' in China and watch as the 'Nanking Government is weakened and discredited'. If the League appealed to Soviet Russia to participate in the attempt to solve the Manchurian issue, the answer received 'will probably be solely aimed at doing as much damage as possible to the prestige of the League'. On the other hand, E. H. Carr, assistant adviser on League of Nations affairs and newly returned from Geneva, was 'convinced' that, if the Soviets were asked to participate at the League, 'they will (apart perhaps from one or two speeches to the gallery) take a reasonable and even helpful part in the proceedings'. Besides, he believed that the Soviets 'may conceivably give us some trouble (not much, I think) if they are there; but that is nothing to the trouble they will give us, if they are away'. Carr also felt that the Soviets were now more willing to co-operate than ever before. The final word was Vansittart's. The PUS agreed with Carr's analysis, and proposed that the British accept the facts of the Lytton Report, delay discussions of its recommendations (to avoid precipitate Japanese action) and invite the Soviets to participate in the process.<sup>161</sup>

The rest of the year was filled with rumours and speculation about Soviet-Japanese relations. The embassy in Tokyo continued to stress that neither side wanted war in the short term, and a possible non-aggression pact between the two nations continued to be bruited, but there were also ongoing reports of border clashes between them.<sup>162</sup> The crux was how Japan would fare at Geneva. With Japan's clearly being unwilling to accept any censure, the British now had to formulate a policy. Most favoured not taking the lead in denouncing Japan and remaining firm in support of any action collectively decided.<sup>163</sup> This was complicated by Soviet actions.

In mid-December, Moscow had renewed diplomatic relations with China.<sup>164</sup> At the Foreign Office, this action was thought to run counter

<sup>161</sup> Minutes, Pratt (31 Oct), Orde (1 Nov), E. H. Carr (3 Nov), Wellesley (4 Nov) and Vansittart (4 Nov) on Drummond to Simon, personal, 24 Oct 1932, FO 371/16180/F7681/1/10.

<sup>162</sup> Lindley to FO, disp 516, 27 Sept 1932, FO 371/16246/F7978/369/23; Garstin (consul general, Harbin) to FO, disp 95, 18 Oct 1932, FO 371/16181/F8021/1/10; Lindley to FO, disp 565 confidential, 26 Oct 1932, FO 371/16182/F8275/1/10; Lindley to FO, disp 590, 9 Nov 1932, FO 371/16246/F8435/369/23; Lindley to FO, tel 409, 8 Dec 1932, FO 371/16183/F8509/1/10.

<sup>163</sup> Cadogan's minute, 26 Dec 1932, FO 371/16185/F8873/1/10; 'The Sino-Japanese Conflict', Pratt, 23 Dec 1932, FO 371/17073/F74/33/10.

<sup>164</sup> Ovey to FO, tel 236 confidential, 12 Dec 1932, minute (12 Dec), V. A. L. Mallet (FED), FO 371/16228/F8583/2173/10; Ingram (Peking) to FO, tel 424 (tour), 13 Dec



to earlier attempts to promote a Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact and to be 'provocative' towards Japan. No one thought that the agreement presaged a Chinese turn towards communism, but it was clear that, with the failure of the League to restrain Japan, the Chinese were considering the possibility that Soviet Russia might prove more reliable in checking Tokyo's aggression.<sup>165</sup> There were other concerns about Soviet actions. Sir Samuel Hoare, the secretary of state for India, called strongly for the need to establish a British consular representative at Urumchi (modern Wulumuqi) in Sinkiang province in order to combat the continued Soviet economic penetration of that region.<sup>166</sup> There was little doubt at the Foreign Office about the Soviet threat and its repercussions on British policy in the Far East, but the dead hand of the Treasury was felt unlikely to sanction the expense involved.

The new year began on an unpropitious note. On 1 January, the Japanese expanded their campaign in China, advancing into Jehol province. This latest adventure seemed sure to make Japan's case at Geneva less promising. The Foreign Office thus began to consider the possibility that Japan might either be expelled from the League or leave on its own. The members of the Far Eastern Department preached conciliation as far as possible, but Cadogan contended that 'it would be far better that she [Japan] should go than that the League should swallow its pride and its principles to keep her'. Vansittart looked at how this would affect British strategic foreign policy in the region. To those who argued that if Japan were to leave the League there would be 'no restraint' on her, the PUS pointed out:

What restraint is she under now except that of her own capacities for absorption and the fear of Russia, with whom she may anyhow eventually come to a second round? No local expert thinks there is any prospect of Japan going Bolshevik. There is then little chance of any lasting Russo-Japanese bloc, especially as the decomposing or reviving mass of China will always provide them with bones of contention.

Relying on such a policy did not make for, in Vansittart's words, 'an alluring future', but, as the British were not yet able 'to look after [them] selves', it seemed all that was possible.<sup>167</sup>

1932, FO 371/16228/F8599/2173/10; Lindley to FO, disp 680, 22 Dec 1932, FO 371/17117/F512/512/10.

<sup>165</sup> Ingram to FO, disp 1706, 23 Dec 1932, FO 371/17117/F1159/512/10.

<sup>166</sup> Walton (India Office) to Collier, 19 Dec 1932, FO 371/16214/F8767/340/10.

<sup>167</sup> Minutes, Pratt (23 Dec 1932 and 5 Jan 1933), Cadogan (7 Jan 1933) and two by Vansittart (both 1 Jan 1933), all FO 371/17073/F74/33/10; 'Sino-Japanese dispute:



Vansittart's latter concern was also felt elsewhere. On 18 December 1932, Lindley had advised British conciliation of Japan on the assumption that 'the British Empire is not prepared to face war'.<sup>168</sup> But what of Soviet strength? As the trade talks between Britain and Soviet Russia progressed, there were continued reports of economic distress in the latter due to famine and problems with the five-year plan. 'Everything seems to show', Collier noted on these reports, 'that the Soviet Government are in the tightest place they have ever been in since Lenin was forced to adopt the "New Economic Policy" more than ten years ago.'<sup>169</sup> Ovey was confident that the Stalinist regime faced no internal political threat, but others at the Foreign Office believed that its grip on power might be uncertain. While the Anglo-Soviet trade talks ground on, much time was spent considering Soviet-Japanese relations. Lindley informed the Foreign Office that Japanese officers regarded war with Soviet Russia as 'inevitable'.<sup>170</sup>

At the Foreign Office, such an outcome seemed more contingent than inevitable. Philip Broad pointed out that Japan had two possible enemies, the United States and Soviet Russia. He saw war with the latter as 'less unlikely' than with the former because the Japanese would have a 'greater chance of a successful issue' with Soviet Russia. But, in either case, he saw 'little prospect' of war 'for many years'. Victor Mallet, another member of the Far Eastern Department, argued that, 'if the Militarists remain long enough in the saddle in Japan', a war with Soviet Russia might occur, despite the fact that the Soviets were 'behaving in a perfectly conciliatory manner over Manchuria'. Thus, the question of a war between the two states remained a 'hypothetical question depending upon future circumstances which are still quite imponderable'. But, in all cases, Wellesley concluded, the circumstances in the region made for a 'very dangerous combination'.<sup>171</sup>

In mid-January, the Soviets published correspondence with Japan dealing with the effort to reach a non-aggression pact between the two states. The Japanese response was 'irritation' at Moscow's 'tactless' move. But Mallet argued that this reflected more its sinister intentions than any pique: 'Japan wants to keep her hands as free as possible

League policy and possible demand for the expulsion of them', Pratt, 12 Jan 1933, FO 371/17074/F392/33/10, minutes, Orde (12 Jan) and Cadogan (13 Jan).

<sup>168</sup> Lindley to FO, tel 416, 18 Dec 1932, FO 371/16184/F8687/1/10.

<sup>169</sup> Ovey to FO, disp 726, 12 Dec 1932, FO 371/16324/N7653/39/38; Collier's minute (30 Dec); Ovey to FO, disp 730, 19 Dec 1932, FO 371/16321/N7657/22/38.

<sup>170</sup> Lindley to FO, disp 660, 9 Dec 1932, FO 371/17152/F154/154/23 and minutes.

<sup>171</sup> Lindley to FO, tel 19, 13 Jan 1933, FO 371/17151/F317/116/23.

for dealing with the Soviet as she thinks fit later on.’<sup>172</sup> Certainly, such considerations seemed to be the subtext of the speech given by Viacheslav Molotov on 23 January. The Soviet prime minister noted that Soviet Russia must maintain its vigilance and military strength in the light of Japan’s reaction, although he held open the possibility of a future agreement between the two states. This led to comment from Edward Walker, who had just returned to the Northern Department from Moscow, where he had been first secretary at the embassy. He did not feel that any agreement was likely: ‘I am convinced that neither Japan nor the USSR are [sic] fundamentally pacific in their relations with each other. Japan however is fairly frankly bellicose, while the USSR pretend to an immaculate pacifism.’<sup>173</sup>

More evidence of each side’s preparations for possible war was soon forthcoming. Collier found Soviet Russia’s growing strength disconcerting:

A large and well-equipped army at the absolute disposal of a dictatorship which holds all means lawful for achieving world revolution must be an uneasy factor in the future, whatever the present (and probably quite sincere) protestations of pacifism.

Lancelot Oliphant, the assistant undersecretary whose ambit included the Northern Department, was less concerned: ‘Quite possibly progress has been made in the fighting equipment of the Soviet forces to an extent far surpassing that made in the economic and commercial spheres’, he sniffed. ‘But so colossal [has] been the ineptitude in these latter that is not saying much.’ The assistant undersecretary completed his dismissal by adding that ‘while the Russian is by nature a wonderful person at sheer physical endurance he has never been much of an organiser’.<sup>174</sup> However, on 19 February Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, the Soviet commissar for war, emphasized Soviet Russia’s ability and readiness to

<sup>172</sup> Broad’s two minutes (20 Jan and 19 Jan) on Ovey to FO, disp 35, 17 Jan 1933, FO 371/17151/F468/116/23, and Lindley to FO, tel 25, 19 Jan 1933, FO 371/17151/F446/116/23; Mallet’s quoted remarks from his minute (20 Jan) on the former; for the context, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East 1933–1941* (London, 1992), 8–9.

<sup>173</sup> Ovey to FO, tel 6, 25 Jan 1933, FO 371/17151/F599/116/23, Walker’s minute (30 Jan); Ovey to FO, disp 71, 31 Jan 1933, FO 371/17261/N748/748/38.

<sup>174</sup> E. A. H. James (military attaché, Tokyo) to Lindley, disp 33, 28 Dec 1932, FO 371/17149/F747/11/23; Ovey to FO, disp 67, 30 Jan 1933, minutes by Oliphant and Collier (both 7 Feb), FO 371/17256/N745/207/38; Samuelson, *Plans for Stalin’s War Machine*, 136–7, 154–7; R. W. Davies, ‘Soviet Military Expenditure and the Armaments Industry, 1929–33’, 583–9.

resist Japan. By March, the Foreign Office noted that 'both sides regard a war as inevitable in the not very distant future'.<sup>175</sup>

Hitler's accession to power at the end of January had introduced complications in Europe. The official Soviet response to Hitler was muted. Nor did the British anticipate an immediate worsening in relations between Germany and Soviet Russia. Faced with famine at home and Japan in the Far East, 'the Soviet Govt.', Collier wrote, 'are clearly in no condition to quarrel with anyone at the moment',<sup>176</sup> and reports from Berlin suggested that the Germans were adopting a line similar to that of Moscow.<sup>177</sup> Even the signing of a Franco-Soviet pact of non-aggression on 15 February was not thought to adumbrate any break between Hitler and Stalin.<sup>178</sup> This belief was due to the difficult state of Anglo-Soviet trade discussions. The British believed that Moscow was attempting to use the German connection as a bargaining tool in the ongoing negotiations with London.

These trade talks revealed the diversity of British departmental views about Soviet Russia.<sup>179</sup> The Foreign Office saw the talks in their political context. Collier and Vansittart contended that no trade concessions be given unless the Soviets were willing to deal with a variety of other political matters, including the continued harassment of the Soviet personnel employed at the British embassy. The Board of Trade, the Department of Overseas Trade and the Export Credit Guarantee Department, concerned about unemployment, exports and the balance of trade, wanted an agreement concluded as soon as possible, if necessary ignoring the political concerns of the Foreign Office. The Treasury saw the matter in connection with the forthcoming World Economic Conference, scheduled for June.<sup>180</sup> They wanted an orderly international trading scene, and wished only to see Anglo-Soviet trade reach an acceptable equilibrium; they were quite oblivious to the Foreign Office's political concerns.

<sup>175</sup> Ovey to FO, disp 123, 27 Feb 1933, FO 371/17256/N1411/207/38; R. Allen minute (13 Mar) on Lindley to FO, disp 59 confidential, FO 371/17151/F1634/116/23; Haslam, *Threat from the East*, 8–9.

<sup>176</sup> Ovey to FO, tel 26, 5 Mar 1933, FO 371/17249/N1432/101/38, and the minute by Collier (6 Mar); Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933–1939* (London, 1984), 6–11.

<sup>177</sup> Rumbold (ambassador, Berlin) to FO, disp 271, 22 Mar 1933, FO 371/17249/N2048/101/38.

<sup>178</sup> Tyrrell (ambassador, Paris) to FO, disp 434, 25 Mar 1933, FO 371/17256/N2223/232/38.

<sup>179</sup> Neilson, 'Cautionary Tale'.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*; Clavin, *Failure of Economic Diplomacy*, 37–59.

Anglo-Soviet relations exploded on 12 March. The arrest, on charges of espionage and sabotage, of six British engineers working in Soviet Russia for Metro-Vickers created a firestorm.<sup>181</sup> All the dislike of Soviet Russia that had existed since the Bolshevik revolution was brought to the fore. Indeed, as one official at the Foreign Office remarked, for public reaction 'there has been nothing like it since Jenkin's [sic] Ear'.<sup>182</sup> Ovey was recalled at the end of March, and he warned the Cabinet a few days later of the impossibility of dealing with the Soviet regime.<sup>183</sup> Pushed by Ovey, the Foreign Office and public and parliamentary opinion, the Cabinet submerged the differing views of the departments, and passed legislation permitting an embargo to be placed on Soviet goods in retaliation for the arrests.

Despite this furore, the Metro-Vickers incident turned out to be a tempest in a teapot. In June, two months after the passing of sentences upon the engineers, there were negotiations in London between Litvinov, in the British capital for the World Economic Conference, and the economic adviser to the British government, Sir Horace Wilson. Further discussions between Litvinov and Simon ensued on 26 and 28 June. All was resolved.<sup>184</sup> The British prisoners were released on 1 July, and, simultaneously, the British embargo was lifted. The Anglo-Soviet trade discussions were renewed, and seven months of hard negotiations followed, with the departmental differences in the British government re-emerging along the same lines as before the Metro-Vickers incident. However, a new Anglo-Soviet trade agreement was signed on 16 February 1934, without any of the attendant political issues being resolved (to the chagrin of the Foreign Office).<sup>185</sup> But, if the Metro-Vickers incident did little to affect the fundamentals of the trade negotiations, it did have an impact. The strong public reaction meant that politicians had to be wary of any future dealings with the Soviet government, lest the passions stirred by Metro-Vickers again come to

<sup>181</sup> Neilson, 'Cautionary Tale'; Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution*; Gordon W. Morrell, 'Redefining Intelligence and Intelligence-Gathering: The Industrial Intelligence Centre and the Metro-Vickers Affair, Moscow 1933', *INS*, 9, 3 (1994), 520–33.

<sup>182</sup> Ashton-Gwatkin to Strang, 16 Apr 1933, Strang Papers, STRN 4/5. This refers to the war between Spain and Britain that began in 1739 ostensibly over the fact that the ear of a British captain, Robert Jenkins, had been sliced off by the Spanish, pickled and sent to the British government.

<sup>183</sup> Remarks, 'Committee on Anglo-Soviet Relations. Notes of Meeting held at No. 10 Downing Street, SW1, on Monday, April 3rd, 1933 at 11 a.m.', ns, SRC (33), Cab 27/550.

<sup>184</sup> Simon to Litvinov, the reply, and Simon to Litvinov, all 29 Jun 1933, Simon Papers, FO 800/288.

<sup>185</sup> Collier had felt unhappy with the way that the entire Metro-Vickers episode had been handled: Collier to Strang, 2 Aug 1933, Strang Papers, STRN 4/6.

the fore. As an astute political observer noted at the time, 'the amount of prejudice stirred up the moment you say Russia in some quarters is extraordinary'.<sup>186</sup> And, while it did not create any new anti-communism, it did reinforce the existing views that Soviet Russia was, at best, difficult to deal with and, at worst, not a country that should be treated with at all. Simon, for example, noted that Soviet Russia had a government 'whose outlook and reactions are beyond ordinary rational calculation'.<sup>187</sup>

But such repercussions were for the future and did not stop the flow of events. The mixture of Metro-Vickers, 'the uncertainty as to what Hitler and Goring [sic] will do next' and the fractious debates over the future of India made 'the situation', in Neville Chamberlain's words, 'more threatening than I have known it for a long time'.<sup>188</sup> Throughout February and March 1933, the disarmament talks in Geneva collapsed under the weight of German and Japanese obstruction.<sup>189</sup> At the end of March, Japan withdrew from the League. In April there was further speculation about the possibility of a Russo-Japanese war, fuelled by a conversation between the British and Soviet military attachés in Tokyo.<sup>190</sup> In the Japanese capital, Lindley believed that Soviet Russia continued to dominate Japanese planning, while in Moscow British officials were convinced that Soviet Russia had no wish for 'a quarrel with Japan just at the moment'.<sup>191</sup>

There were other events that had implications for British policy towards Moscow. In April there were rumours that the United States might recognize Soviet Russia diplomatically, an occurrence attributed to each side's belief that it would profit from consequent improved trade and to the pernicious influence of William C. Bullitt, the American diplomat whom Collier described as 'enthusiastic and unscrupulous and . . . notoriously pro-Soviet', on President Roosevelt.<sup>192</sup> On 5 May

<sup>186</sup> T. Jones to J. Burgon Bickersteth, 29 Apr 1933, in T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950* (London, 1954), 108.

<sup>187</sup> Simon to J. Wylie, 3 Apr 1933, Simon Papers, FO 800/288.

<sup>188</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister Hilda, 18 Mar 1933, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/820.

<sup>189</sup> Eden to W. Ormsby-Gore (MP), 12 Feb 1933, Avon Papers, AP 14/2/204; Cecil to Baldwin, letters, 17 Feb, 9 Mar, 15 Mar 1933, all Baldwin Papers, 121; minutes 12th meeting Ministerial Committee on Disarmament, 2 Mar 1933, Cab 27/505, DC (M) (32).

<sup>190</sup> Lindley to FO, disp 157 confidential, 14 Mar 1933, minutes, Randall (21 Apr) and Orde (21 Apr), FO 371/17152/F2550/116/23.

<sup>191</sup> Lindley to Wellesley, 24 Mar 1933, FO 371/17149/F2615/11/23; minute, Randall (28 Apr) on Strang to FO, disp 204, 20 Apr 1933, FO 371/17133/F2737/2463/10; Lindley to FO, disp 183, 27 Mar 1933, FO 371/17151/F2877/116/23.

<sup>192</sup> DOT to FO, 18 Apr 1932, FO 371/17263/N2950/1149/38; Vansittart to FO, tel 9, 28 Apr 1933, FO 371/17263/N3231/1149/38, Collier's minute (1 May); cf. Lindsay (ambassador, Washington) to Collier, 24 May 1933, FO 371/17263/N4243/1149/38.

the German and Soviet governments extended the Treaty of Berlin.<sup>193</sup> With Polish–German relations at a low point since the advent of Hitler, Collier saw this as a cynical attempt by the Soviets ‘to see what they could get’ out of the Germans’ need to ensure that Poland remained isolated, much to the irritation of Warsaw, which had hoped to play the same bargaining game.<sup>194</sup> In Paris, during debates in the French Senate over the ratification of the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact, the renewal of the Treaty of Berlin was seen by many to negate any advantage that France might have gained by concluding the agreement with Moscow.<sup>195</sup>

All of this activity led the British to reconsider the direction of Soviet foreign policy. From Moscow, John Vyvyan, third secretary at the embassy, argued that an article published by Karl Radek in *Pravda* on 10 May marked the end of Soviet support for the revision of Versailles, ‘a fact of some consequence’ in Collier’s view.<sup>196</sup> Strang wrote a major despatch on 4 June from Moscow on the same theme. For him, ‘the active imperialist policy of Japan and the Fascist revolution in Germany have, together[,] played a decisive part in reorienting the foreign policy of the Soviet Union’. This new policy, the *chargé d’affaires* argued, aimed at securing Soviet Russia’s Western borders by means of non-aggression pacts, while adopting a ‘policy of extreme prudence bordering on pusillanimity’ towards Japan. This meant that Soviet Russia was now ‘an element making for stability in Europe’.<sup>197</sup>

This was all to the good, but Strang warned that ‘it is an axiom in the Soviet press that His Majesty’s Government stand firmly on the side of Japan, not only in her Manchurian adventure, but also in her anti-Soviet plans’.<sup>198</sup> For Moscow, Britain’s anti-Soviet policy was also manifest in other ways: the denunciation of the Temporary Commercial Agreement and the anti-dumping provisions of the Ottawa agreements (the Metro-Vickers incident, in the Soviet view, had provided a retrospective excuse for London’s anti-Soviet commercial policy). These were not the only manifestations of Britain’s perceived antipathy towards Moscow. The Four-Power Pact – an arrangement proposed by Mussolini in March

<sup>193</sup> Strang to FO, tels 385 and 386, 6 May 1933, FO 371/17250/N3415/101/38, Collier’s minute (8 May); Haslam, *Struggle for Collective Security*, 12–13.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*; Collier’s minutes on both Erskine (minister, Warsaw) to FO, disp 172, 28 Apr 1933, FO 371/17270/N3197/1610/38, and Rumbold (ambassador, Berlin) to FO, tel 97, 8 May 1933, FO 371/17250/N3482/101/38.

<sup>195</sup> Campbell (*chargé d’affaires*, Paris) to FO, disp 654, 6 May 1933, FO 371/17256/N3504/232/38; Tyrrell to FO, disp 755, 23 May 1933, FO 371/17256/N3954/232/38.

<sup>196</sup> Strang to FO, disp 287, 23 May 1933, FO 371/17264/N4046/748/38, Collier’s minute (31 May).

<sup>197</sup> Strang to FO, disp 306, 4 June 1933, FO 371/17261/N4329/748/38, minutes, Shone (nd) and Collier (both 14 June).

<sup>198</sup> Strang to FO, disp 329, 14 Jun 1933, FO 371/17154/F4364/583/23.

1933 whereby Italy, Britain, France and Germany would deal with a number of important issues without reference to the League – was viewed by the Soviets as a British plot to drive Germany to the East.<sup>199</sup> Strang's dispatch was seen at the Foreign Office as a 'clear exposition' of Soviet policy. Collier believed that Soviet antipathy towards the British was based on the fact that, unlike the continental Powers, 'we cannot be induced to play the Soviet game by fear of our next door neighbour' and thus could 'pay attention to Soviet activities against us elsewhere'.<sup>200</sup>

Another indication of the direction of Soviet foreign policy came from an interview on 17 June between Litvinov and Reginald (Rex) Leeper.<sup>201</sup> Leeper had known Litvinov well in 1918, when the latter had been the Bolsheviks' emissary in London, and Leeper had acted as the unofficial conduit between the Soviets and the Foreign Office.<sup>202</sup> Litvinov now told Leeper with 'regret rather than with bitterness' that his 'main desire had always been to establish satisfactory working relations with us', but he had found this difficult to do, as a result of the anti-Soviet stance of 'press & Parliament'. Leeper's general observations about the Soviet minister were interesting: 'Though a moderate man according to Soviet standards & at bottom perhaps quite benevolent, he is an out-and-out Communist of the Lenin school & will be quite unyielding on anything that he regards as a question of principle.' However, Leeper did not feel that this ruled out improved relations. Instead, he recommended (and Vansittart supported) that the Foreign Office inspire 'a leading article in the Times next week on Russia, while Litvinov is still in London, in which the attitude of H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] was made perfectly plain', in the hope that this might 'clear his [Litvinov's] mind of some erroneous conceptions regarding our policy and our motives'.

In July and August, there was further evidence of the Soviet intention to abandon the revisionist nations and to support the *status quo*. This policy was due to the belligerent attitudes of Japan and Germany. In the Far East, the Soviet military attaché outlined the continued desire in Japanese military circles for a war with Soviet Russia, an attitude which the Foreign Office viewed as Japanese 'tail-twisting' designed to annoy

<sup>199</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany* (Chicago and London, 1970), I, 47–52.

<sup>200</sup> Strang to FO, disp 306, 4 June 1933, FO 371/17261/N4329/748/38, minutes, Shone (nd) and Collier (both 14 June).

<sup>201</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on untitled memo, R. A. Leeper, 17 June 1933, FO 371/17241/N4812/5/38, minute, Vansittart (19 Jun).

<sup>202</sup> Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921. Intervention and the War* (Princeton, 1961), 60–1, 80–1 and 294–5.



the Soviets.<sup>203</sup> With Anglo-Japanese relations worsening over trade disputes, the situation in the Far East had to be handled with care.<sup>204</sup> Europe held other difficulties. At the end of July, Strang sent a long dispatch on the state of Soviet–German relations. He argued that good relations between the two countries had been shaken, particularly by the call of the German representative at the World Economic Conference for an autarkic German trade policy, expansion into Ukraine and ‘continued struggle against the *Untermensch*’.<sup>205</sup> Strang reiterated that Soviet policy

in the present period of armistice with the capitalist world is essentially defensive and hence pacific. Their major fear is from Japan, and it is in their interest to invest their relations with Germany in the present new and difficult conditions with some element of the stability which has hitherto seemed natural to them. As, however, the threat from Germany, unlike the threat from Japan, is not imminent and as Germany is isolated in Europe, the Soviet Government are not likely to adopt with Germany the subservient tone they are wont to use with Japan, but will employ the aggressive diplomatic tactics which they find have paid them in the past with other countries.<sup>206</sup>

At the Foreign Office, this state of affairs was thought possibly advantageous. Poor German–Soviet relations meant that Moscow would be unable to play Berlin against London in the ongoing Anglo–Soviet trade negotiations. However, there was also concern that a diminution of the Nazis’ hostility towards Soviet Russia might result in a *rapprochement* between the two states. But, for the present, Collier noted, ‘everything seems to point to the Soviet Government being so preoccupied by the menace of Hitler that they will not quarrel with anyone else while it lasts’.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Snow (*chargé d'affaires*, Tokyo) to FO, disp 352, 21 Jun 1933, FO 371/17151/F4857/116/23, minute (24 Jul) by Randall; Snow to FO, disp 423, 17 Jul 1933, FO 371/17152/F5532/116/23.

<sup>204</sup> Snow to Wellesley, 13 May 1933, FO 371/17152/F5080/128/23; John Sharkey, ‘British Perceptions of Japanese Economic Development in the 1920s: With Special Reference to the Cotton Industry’, in J. E. Hunter and S. Sugiyama, eds., *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600–2000*, vol. IV, *Economic and Business Relations* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 249–82; Ishii Osamu, ‘Markets and Diplomacy: The Anglo-Japanese Rivalries over Cotton Goods Markets, 1930–1936’, in I. Nish and Yoichi Kibata, eds., *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600–2000*, vol. II, *The Political–Diplomatic Dimension, 1931–2000* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 51–77.

<sup>205</sup> Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany*, 79; John L. Heineman, ‘Constantin von Neurath and German Policy at the London Economic Conference of 1933: Backgrounds to the Resignation of Alfred Hugenberg’, *JMH*, 41, 2 (1969), 160–88.

<sup>206</sup> Strang to FO, disp 449, 9 Aug 1933, FO 371/17250/N6346/101/38, minutes, Barclay, 25 Aug, Howe, 28 Aug, and Mounsey 31 Aug.

<sup>207</sup> Collier’s minute (26 Jul) on Strang to FO, disp 410, 18 Jul 1933, FO 371/17273/N5526/1610/38; Strang to FO, disp 445, 9 Aug 1933, FO 371/17277/N6261/6261/38.



The British were unconvinced that the Soviets had abandoned Berlin in favour of better relations with France and Poland. Even visits to Soviet Russia in late August and September by French ministers did not lead the Foreign Office to believe unanimously that there was an end to Rapallo. In the Northern Department, R. G. Howe believed that the Soviets might take a 'long step towards the "Versailles" powers especially France & Poland', but Collier believed that the French ministers were 'surprisingly gullible' and had been deceived about the state of affairs in Soviet Russia. While he noted that Hitler was 'putting more and more water into his [anti-Soviet] wine', Collier was not convinced that the Soviets believed the Führer. 'If & when they are convinced of it (and the Germans seem to be trying hard to convince them)', he concluded, 'they will no doubt cease further advances to the Poles and the French (unless they see economic as well as political advantage in them)'.<sup>208</sup>

Meanwhile, there was more discussion about Soviet-Japanese relations. With a Sino-Japanese *rapprochement* considered likely, the British were interested in what this meant both for their own and for the Soviet position.<sup>209</sup> On 29 September, Litvinov told Strang that Soviet Russia would not participate in the stalled disarmament talks at Geneva, because 'the Japanese would refuse to be bound by any measure whatsoever'.<sup>210</sup> With Germany's leaving both the League and the disarmament talks on 14 October, this situation could only get worse. Amidst a swirl of rumours about the establishment of formal Soviet-American relations, the War Office put forward an assessment of the likelihood of a Russo-Japanese war.<sup>211</sup> The War Office accepted the Foreign Office's assumption that Soviet Russia was 'in no condition to-day to fight a real war with Japan', but argued that the Soviets had very much improved their position militarily in the Far East. As a result, if Japan wished to go

<sup>208</sup> Coote (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, disp 495, 11 Sept 1933, FO 371/17261/N6873/232/38, Collier's minute (19 Sept); Coote to FO, disp 502, 12 Sept 1933, FO 371/17261/N6877/748/38, minutes, Howe and Collier (both 20 Sept), and Strang to FO, disp 523, 25 Sept 1933, FO 371/17277/N7180/6343/38.

<sup>209</sup> Lampson to FO, disp 928, 18 Jun 1933, and minutes, FO 371/17081/F5709/33/10; Snow (*chargé d'affaires*, Tokyo), disp 478, 14 Aug 1933, and minutes, FO 371/17081/F5950/33/10; Ingram to Lampson (23 Jun), enclosed in Lampson to FO, disp 699, 7 Jul 1933, FO 371/17081/F6008/33/10.

<sup>210</sup> Strang to FO, disp 543, 5 Oct 1933, FO 371/17262/N7480/748/38, minute, Shone (17 Oct).

<sup>211</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Lindsay to FO, tel 566, 21 Oct 1933, FO 371/17263/N7634/1149/38; Connor-Green to Col. E. Miles (MI2), 30 Oct 1933, and reply, 2 Nov 1933, FO 371/17151/F6925/116/23, minutes, Randall (4 Nov) and Collier (23 Nov).

to war, the country needed to 'improve her railway communications towards the Russian frontier'. The War Office saw the military situation in the Far East as a race between 'the efficiency of the Russian Army [which] is likely to increase' and an improvement in Japan's logistic capabilities. The War Office favoured Japan: 'delay seems to be more advantageous to Japan than to Russia'. Collier agreed – 'our views on Russian intentions are the same as those of the WO' – but the fact remained that the Far East was a powder keg, and, in Randall's words, '1935–6 may prove critical.' Tensions remained high. The Russian ambassador to China was defiant, arguing that, in any clash between Soviet Russia and Japan, the latter would be bested, prompting Orde to retort that 'the Soviets always talk as big as they dare'.<sup>212</sup> Wellesley remained convinced that the 'ultimate elimination of Russia from the Far East is a matter of such vital interest to Japan that it can never be absent from the minds of Japanese statesmen'.<sup>213</sup>

But the complicated tangle in the Far East between Japan and Soviet Russia was not the focus of British strategic foreign policy in October and early November 1933. All eyes were on two issues: the fate of the disarmament talks and whether Britain would continue to pay instalments on the American war debt.<sup>214</sup> Simon's stock continued to plummet in the government, while Eden's reputation rose as a result of his endeavours at Geneva.<sup>215</sup> In Cabinet on 26 October, Neville Chamberlain ridiculed Roosevelt's economic policies, and called for improved relations with Japan.<sup>216</sup> Here, the chancellor noted that he 'greatly regretted' the Washington Naval Conference of 1922, which, he argued, had led to the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance without any commensurate gain for Britain. In light of the effect of Japan both on Britain's position

<sup>212</sup> Orde's minute (17 Nov) on Lampson to FO, tel 1109, 14 Nov 1933, FO 371/17152/F7137/116/23.

<sup>213</sup> Wellesley's minute (29 Nov) on Snow (*chargé d'affaires*, Tokyo) to FO, disp 584, 13 Oct 1933, FO 371//17152/F7301/116/23; Snow to FO, disp 596, 25 Oct 1933, FO 371/17152/F5317/116/23.

<sup>214</sup> Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament*, 156–67; Christoph M. Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations* (Chicago and London, 1976), 174–93; Sargent to Phipps (ambassador, Berlin), 11 and 16 Nov 1933, both Phipps Papers, PHPP 2/10; minutes, Cabinets 52, 53, 45, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64 (9 Oct–22 Nov 1933), all Cab 23/77; Sir Frederick Leith-Ross's correspondence, Hopkins Papers, T 175/79.

<sup>215</sup> MacDonald's diary entries, 8, 15, 18, 20, 22 Oct 1933, MacDonald Papers PRO 30/69/1753/1; Tyrrell (ambassador, Paris) to Baldwin, 28 Sept 1933, and Ormsby Gore (Conservative MP) to Baldwin, 1 Oct 1933, both Baldwin Papers, 121.

<sup>216</sup> Chamberlain's notes [but c. 26 Oct], T 172/2081; minutes, 26 Oct 1933, Cab 57(33) and Cab 58(33), both Cab 23/77; N. Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 28 Oct 1933, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/848; his remarks in the minutes of Cab 57(33), 26 Oct 1933, Cab 23/77.

in the Far East and on naval disarmament, Chamberlain argued for a policy of improved relations between London and Tokyo.

These remarks adumbrated a re-examination of Britain's military position. This stemmed from a reconsideration of the 'ten-year rule'. The impetus for this began in January 1931, when Hankey suggested to MacDonald that the rule needed to be re-evaluated, in part because 'Russia's activity in armaments is notorious'.<sup>217</sup> This view was reinforced at the Three-Party Conference on Disarmament in May 1931, when Austen Chamberlain had questioned whether the 'ten-year rule' was still valid in light of the changing international circumstances, while others argued that Soviet Russia's rearmament undermined French security by weakening the position of Paris's allies in eastern Europe.<sup>218</sup> In February 1932, the COS recommended that the 'ten-year rule' be dropped, despite the Treasury's opposition.<sup>219</sup> The COS's argument was accepted at the CID on 22 March and approved the following day by the Cabinet.<sup>220</sup> Thus, in October 1933, when the COS produced their Annual Review for 1933, it was based on the assumption of the abolition of the ten-year rule.<sup>221</sup> The COS's recommendations regarding Britain's defence priorities were accepted, and it was agreed that a committee should be set up to determine how to remedy the country's military deficiencies.<sup>222</sup> Rearmament, not disarmament, was the order of the day.

By the autumn of 1933, the 'period of persuasion' was over. Japan had defied the League and continued its depredations against China. Hitler had made it manifest that Germany was no longer interested

<sup>217</sup> 'The Basis of Service Estimates', Hankey, secret, 9 Jan 1931, Cab 21/2093.

<sup>218</sup> DC(P), minutes 3rd meeting, 7 May 1931; repeated 4th meeting, 14 May, both Cab 16/102.

<sup>219</sup> Minutes, 101st meeting COS, 4 Feb 1932, Cab 53/4; 'Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', CID 1082-B, COS, 23 Feb 1932, Cab 4/21; 'Note by the Treasury on the Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (1082-B)', CID 1087-B, Treasury, 11 Mar 1932, Cab 4/21.

<sup>220</sup> Minutes, 255th meeting CID, 22 Mar 1932, Cab 2/5; minutes, Cab 19(32), 23 Mar 1932, Cab 23/70.

<sup>221</sup> Hankey to MacDonald, 16 Jan 1933, enclosing 'Imperial Defence as Affected by Disarmament and the Situation in Europe', Hankey, secret, 16 Jan 1933, both Cab 21/2093; 'Imperial Defence Policy. Annual Review (1933) by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', CID 113-B, COS, 12 Oct 1933, Cab 4/22. For priorities, see minutes 111th meeting COS, 20 Jun 1933, Cab 53/4.

<sup>222</sup> Minutes, 261st meeting CID, 9 Nov 1933, Cab 2/6; approved at Cabinet, minutes, 10 Nov 1933, Cab 62(33), Cab 23/77; Hankey to MacDonald, secret, 5 Oct 1933, and 'secret' untitled memo, Hankey, Vansittart and Fisher, 5 Oct 1933, both MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/483.

in disarmament. British strategic foreign policy needed to be reconfigured. An unthinking commitment to the post-war settlements and to disarmament appeared no longer to be effective. What did these new circumstances mean for Anglo-Soviet relations? Was Soviet Russia a greater threat to British interests than were the two revisionist Powers? Could Soviet Russia be harnessed to British policy? And would Moscow be willing to co-operate with Britain?

## 2      1933–1934: parallel interests?

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In the autumn of 1933, the ‘period of deterrence’ in British strategic foreign policy began. The bases of British strategic foreign policy since 1925 – arms control and the League – crumbled, but no replacement for these foundations was apparent. On 14 October 1933, Germany left the Disarmament Conference. This, and the suspension of the London Naval Conference in mid-December 1934, meant that a new arms race loomed. The League had approved the Lytton Report on 24 February 1933, and called on the Japanese to remove their forces from Manchuria. The Japanese had refused, had left the League on 27 March, and, instead, had signed the truce of T’ang-Ku with China two months later. This underlined the League’s inability to deal with international problems, and Germany’s own withdrawal from the Geneva body on 14 October 1933 made it clear that the Powers which favoured a revision of the settlement reached at Versailles were going to pursue it outside the bounds of the Covenant.

British policy makers were forced to reconsider how to deal with the revisionist Powers. One step was to determine Britain’s military strength and deficiencies. Another was to attempt to limit the number of threats to Britain’s position. Changes in Soviet policy began to make Moscow a possible (if not attractive) bulwark against aggressive revisionism.<sup>1</sup> First, the Soviet government abandoned its policy of avoiding international entanglements, signed non-aggression pacts with many of its neighbours and hinted that it would be willing to conclude defensive alliances to deter Germany and Japan. Second, Moscow joined the League on 18 September 1934. Thus, in marked contrast to the immediately preceding years, the possibility of Anglo-Soviet co-operation became a serious topic of discussion. Would the existence of parallel interests be enough to improve Anglo-Soviet relations?

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Large, ‘The Origins of Soviet Collective Security Policy, 1930–1932’, *SS*, 30, 2 (1978), 212–36.

The first matter that needed to be considered was the COS's Annual Review for 1933.<sup>2</sup> This study touched off debate about British strategic defence policy, in which Soviet Russia's role was of some import. The positions that were to dominate thinking for the rest of the decade were largely prefigured at the Foreign Office. The COS contended that Britain had three commitments of 'major importance'. In order of priority, they were the defence of the Far East, the defence of Europe and the 'defence of India against Soviet aggression'. This document was examined carefully at the Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> The pressing strategic foreign-policy dimensions of the problems caused by Japan in the Far East were the focus of discussion. Soviet Russia was a key factor in this debate.

For A. W. A. Leeper, any co-operation between Japan and Soviet Russia in the Far East was 'improbable'. Such a state was of possible advantage to Britain, since any 'entanglements' between them 'might have the effect of deflecting Japan from an aggressive attitude towards ourselves'. Leeper also sounded a warning note. If Soviet policy were to change in future, 'it is conceivable that an unholy alliance between Russia and Japan might make our position in the Far East and India a very precarious one'. Orde largely agreed. He felt that Soviet Russia hoped to spread communism in China, all the while checking Japanese expansion in that country: the Japanese wished to expand in China, and regarded communism as 'anathema'. What did this mean for British policy? The head of the Egyptian Department, Maurice Peterson, read the Annual Review as implying the need for an Anglo-Japanese *rap-prochement* in order to eliminate the need 'to regard Japan as a potentially hostile Power with all the cramping limitations which that necessity entails upon our position and influence in Europe'. The Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 had been formed against a 'Russo-German menace', and had been dissolved in 1921 when the menace ended. However, Peterson argued that 'we are once again confronted with a Russo-German menace even though it may not be as yet a joint menace'. He contended that the League of Nations was now ineffectual in defending British interests. 'Nor can we leave our position in the Far East', Peterson concluded, 'to the consolation of Mr Leeper's pious hope (however

<sup>2</sup> 'Imperial Defence Policy. Annual Review (1933) by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', CID 113-B, COS, 12 Oct 1933, Cab 4/22; for priorities, see minutes, 111th meeting COS, 20 Jun 1933, Cab 53/4.

<sup>3</sup> The remainder of this and the following three paragraphs are based on Minutes, 26 Oct and 1 Dec 1933, on 'Imperial Defence Policy. Annual Review (1933) by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', FO 371/17338/W11987/11987/50. Authors are identified in the text.

fervently we may echo it) that Japan may happen to become embroiled with the Soviet before she becomes embroiled with us.'

This was contentious. The head of the American Department, Robert Craigie, objected on two grounds. First, an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement* would support the militarists in Japan; second, it would alienate the United States. Craigie also felt that the possibility of improved relations between Germany, Japan and Soviet Russia was greater than the COS believed, and that preventing this should be 'one of the first objectives of our diplomacy'. Another sharp attack came from Collier. His opposition stemmed from the recent about-face in Soviet foreign policy. Collier observed that the Soviets viewed 'Hitlerite Germany as their greatest foe in Europe' and were 'bitterly opposed to Japanese ambitions'. Thus, he concluded: 'We consequently seem more likely than not to find ourselves where we and the Soviet Government will have a common enemy, though we are not perhaps likely both to be fighting him at the same time.' Thus, Collier completely rejected the feasibility of Peterson's policy of a British *rapprochement* with Japan.

Several other points of view were particularly relevant. Orme Sargent worried about the possibility of a 'hostile' German-Japanese grouping against Britain. Lancelot Oliphant and George Mounsey, the two assistant undersecretaries, both agreed that the order of priorities posited by the COS was correct and called for a further study of the situation in the Far East. Oliphant also rejected Collier's contention that Soviet Russia had changed its spots. Finally, Wellesley argued that Japan, while unreservedly expansionist, was unlikely to attack Britain unless the latter were involved with another Great Power. On the other hand, he did not feel that Britain was in a position to deter Japan militarily, but instead contended that 'economic measures' would have to be employed to counter it.

Some of these arguments had also been made at the CID on 9 November.<sup>4</sup> There, Chamberlain took exception to the priorities assigned by the COS. Echoing his earlier remarks in the Cabinet, the chancellor contended that the European situation might become more significant than the Far East and that Japan might be interested in a *rapprochement* with Britain, and stated that 'he very much wished we could make some effort now to improve our relations with Japan'. This ran counter to the Foreign Office's position. Simon reiterated his department's views: Japan had aggressive intentions in the Far East, the Anglo-Japanese alliance had been aimed at Russo-German aggression (now defunct), and American co-operation in the Far East was essential and would be jeopardized by an

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is based on minutes, 261st meeting CID, 9 Nov 1933, Cab 2/6.

Anglo-Japanese combination. Simon also noted that a German–Japanese grouping directed against Britain would be ‘very alarming’. This combination of solicitude for Chamberlain’s concerns, but rejection of his policy alternatives, left the chancellor with no retort.

This did not mean that Chamberlain and the Treasury had abandoned the field. The argument was pursued in the DRC, the body that MacDonald had proposed be created to examine Britain’s defence policy. The new committee consisted of the COS, Sir Warren Fisher and Vansittart, with Hankey acting as chairman. Thus, the DRC represented the views of the fighting services, the Treasury and the Foreign Office.<sup>5</sup> Taking the conclusions of the CID meeting of 9 November as its terms of reference, the DRC first met on 14 November.<sup>6</sup> The first two meetings were largely taken up with matters of procedure. Not until the third meeting, held 4 December, were substantive matters discussed. In the meantime, Vansittart had outlined his views. On 30 November, the PUS made his contribution to the debate over the COS’s Annual Review for 1933. With regard to priorities, Vansittart took a stance entirely contrary to that of both the COS and the majority of his colleagues. His line of argument remained constant throughout the 1930s:

It seems to be generally agreed that Japan is unlikely to attack us, unless we are engaged elsewhere. Very well then. That puts ‘elsewhere’ first. And elsewhere is Europe and Germany. Furthermore, surely Japan is unlikely to provoke a war with us so long as she is not on better terms with Russia. Nothing points to such an improvement – on the contrary. And if you are going to presuppose a Russo-Japanese understanding or appeasement, you must by that very fact put the Afghanistan–India risk higher. I should prefer to guard against both the Russian and Japanese risk, as well as the German. But we obviously cannot do so. It would cost far too much money & far too many votes – apart from numerous other considerations. If therefore we cannot cover the *whole* ground, first things must come first, and we must begin ‘a day’s march nearer home’.

None the less, Vansittart advocated completing the Singapore naval base as the first order of business, since so much had been invested there already. After that, all should be concentrated in Europe. His conclusion returned to the need to rearm. ‘But I am not prepared’, he wrote, ‘to rely

<sup>5</sup> N. H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, vol. I, *Rearmament Policy* (London, 1976); Wesley Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy. British Intelligence and Nazi Germany 1933–1939* (Ithaca, 1985), 28–34; Gaines Post, Jr, *Dilemmas of Appeasement. British Deterrence and Defense, 1934–1937* (Ithaca and London, 1993), 32–54; and G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury* (Edinburgh, 1979). For a revisionist view, see Keith Neilson, ‘The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement’, *EHR*, 118, 477 (2003), 651–84.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes, 1st meeting DRC, 14 Nov 1933, Cab 16/109.



on pure diplomacy, on other countries, or on economics so far as Germany is concerned.<sup>7</sup>

At the DRC on 4 December, Vansittart reiterated and amplified his observations. He renewed his challenge to the priorities established by the COS, and put forward his view of the international situation generally. Japan would not cause trouble for Britain 'if, at the same time, she was expecting or preparing any trouble with Russia'. For Vansittart, economic diplomacy could contain Japan, 'so long anyhow as [Japanese] accounts with Russia were unsettled'. He outlined his view that Germany was arming rapidly, but declined to estimate when it might strike: 'to attempt to fix any such date was soothsaying'. As to the defence of India against Soviet Russia, Vansittart concurred with the fighting services' estimate: 'Russia had her difficulties with Japan on one flank and with Germany on the other, and also suffered from internal chaos' and thus would be unlikely to bother India.<sup>8</sup>

Other interested parties demanded to be heard. Fisher supported the idea that the defences at Singapore should be completed, but not out of fear of Japan.<sup>9</sup> His approval reflected both the Treasury's dislike of the United States and the Treasury's desire to improve relations with Tokyo by demonstrating that Britain was not the lap dog of the United States. The citadel at Singapore, Fisher felt, would demonstrate to the Japanese that Britain was not a 'backboneless nation' that needed to 'bow down to America'. This was dangerous ground, implying a possible break with the United States. Vansittart and Hankey instead argued that Japan could be dealt with in other ways. The PUS emphasized the impact that Russo-Japanese relations had on the British position. Japan would have 'to take into serious consideration their position vis-à-vis Russia' before assaulting Britain. Since Soviet Russia was 'likely to steer clear of European conflicts' – this was evident from its 'recently negotiated network of non-aggression pacts' in the West – 'Japan would hesitate to act against us whilst Russia was free to act against her.'

Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, the First Sea Lord and chief of the Naval Staff, seized this opportunity. Vansittart's insistence that first priority in planning be accorded to Germany had serious financial implications for the RN. Chatfield had a vested interest in seeing that Japan remained the centre of planning, since the building plans of the Admiralty would be

<sup>7</sup> Vansittart's minute, 30 Nov 1933, FO 371/17338/W11987/11987/50.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes, 3rd meeting DRC, 4 Dec 1933, Cab 16/109. The quotations in the following paragraph are also from this source.

<sup>9</sup> Eunan O'Halperin, *Head of the Civil Service. A Study of Sir Warren Fisher* (London, 1989), 227–65.

adversely affected if Japan were felt only a subsidiary foe.<sup>10</sup> The First Sea Lord attempted to convince the DRC that Japan posed the most immediate threat to Britain and that the naval arms control conference scheduled for 1935 might make Japan even more dangerous. This brought Hankey to the admiral's side, although the chairman of the committee was sympathetic to the idea of improving relations with Japan. This naval bombardment did manage to deflect into the future Vansittart's insistence on the primacy of Germany and to keep the focus on repairing Britain's position in the Far East. With this, the DRC moved, during its next five meetings, away from strategic foreign policy towards discussions of the actual needs of the services. It was not until the end of January 1934 that the wider aspects were considered again.

Events did not stand still. At the Foreign Office, the Far Eastern Department continued to prepare its case for dealing with the British position in the Far East, a project initiated by Vansittart in August.<sup>11</sup> On 16 November, Roosevelt and Litvinov signed a 'gentleman's agreement' by which American diplomatic recognition was extended to Soviet Russia and an implicit blow struck against Japan.<sup>12</sup> The British, enmeshed in the final stages of their own trade negotiations with the Soviets, were impressed by the concessions that the Americans had obtained from Moscow, but were also very much aware of the strategic impact on Japan.<sup>13</sup> As Howe noted on 15 December, 'there is little room for doubt that in making their agreement for recognition the USA and the USSR were not unmindful of the situation in the Far East'.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the British ambassador at Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, reported that his American colleague had stated that Roosevelt had deliberately delayed

<sup>10</sup> Background in Orest M. Babij, 'The Second Labour Government and British Maritime Security, 1929–1931', *D&S*, 6, 3 (1995), 645–71; Babij, 'The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire' and John Ferris, "'It is Our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas": The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919–1929', in G. Kennedy and K. Neilson, eds., *Far-Flung Lines. Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (Portland, OR, and London, 1997), 171–89 and 124–70 respectively; for the 1930s, see Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (London, 2000), 99–102.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes, Randall (5 Aug) and Vansittart (11 Aug) on 'Far East – Changing Situation', Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, 3 Aug 1933, FO 371/17148/F5189/5189/61; minute, Allen, 3 Nov 1933, FO 371/17152/F6818/128/23.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East 1933–1941* (London, 1992), 30–5.

<sup>13</sup> Chilston (ambassador, Moscow) to FO, disp 644, 22 Nov 1933, FO 371/17263/N8485/1149/38; Lindsay to FO, disp 1500, 16 Nov 1933, FO 371/17263/N8492/1149/38; Lindsay to FO, disp 1517, 23 Nov 1933, FO 371/17263/N8686/1149/38; Andrew J. Williams, *Trading with the Bolsheviks. The Politics of East–West Trade 1920–1939* (Manchester and New York, 1992), 168–73.

<sup>14</sup> Minute, Howe (15 Dec) on Snow (*chargé d'affaires*, Tokyo) to FO, disp 621, 5 Nov 1933, FO 371/17264/N8779/1149/38.

signing of the recognition until the ports in the Far East were ice-bound, as he 'feared that a Russo-American "rapprochement" would be the signal for Japan to open hostilities against Russia'.<sup>15</sup>

The British also continued to try to discover the nature of Soviet Russia's foreign policy. In December 1933, there were a series of Soviet pronouncements reiterating Moscow's desire for peace and willingness to co-operate with other Powers. During his return trip to Russia from the United States, Litvinov stopped in Italy and told the Italians of both Moscow's concerns about German ambitions and its desire to work with others to limit Berlin's actions.<sup>16</sup> This contrasted sharply with Litvinov's subsequent stop in Berlin, where the Soviet ambassador spent only a few hours and met no German officials.<sup>17</sup> Lord Chilston, who had replaced Ovey as British ambassador at Moscow in October, reported that Soviet Russia was planning to establish diplomatic relations with the members of the Little Entente, a sign of its move towards the West. But, on the other hand, the new ambassador found little Soviet willingness to compromise in the Anglo-Soviet trade discussions.<sup>18</sup> Still, Chilston was convinced that 'Soviet Russia does want and need peace', and had abandoned the idea of world revolution except for domestic consumption.<sup>19</sup>

On 30 December, Chilston reported two things: the 'growing impression' that a Franco-Soviet agreement of some sort was imminent and a speech by Viacheslav Molotov, the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, in which the League of Nations was faintly praised, in direct contrast to the usual Soviet vituperation towards Geneva.<sup>20</sup> At the Foreign Office, Shone felt this showed that 'the Soviet Government *are* really apprehensive of German designs for expansion to the east, particularly in the event of Soviet Russia becoming embroiled in a war with Japan'. While a pact with France would be a turnabout in Soviet policy, 'it must be remembered that that policy has already undergone a marked change in 1933 – from the "revisionist" to the "anti-revisionist" camp'. Shone argued that one of Litvinov's remarks to Chilston during the trade negotiations, that it was time 'to get "small things" out of the

<sup>15</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 112, 10 Dec 1933, FO 371/17375/W14129/40/98.

<sup>16</sup> Drummond (ambassador, Rome) to FO, disp 364, 5 Dec 1933, FO 371/17262/N8655/748/38.

<sup>17</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 107, 5 December 1933, FO 371/17250/N8732/101/38; Phipps to FO, tel 111, 9 Dec 1933, FO 371/17264/N8822/1149/38.

<sup>18</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 665, 5 Dec 1933, FO 371/17262/N8769/748/38; Chilston to FO, tel 517, 11 Dec 1933, FO 371/17243/N8840/5/38.

<sup>19</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 694, 18 Dec 1933, FO 371/17262/N9135/748/38.

<sup>20</sup> This paragraph is based on Chilston to FO, tel 521, 30 Dec 1933, FO 371/18297/N1/1/38, and the minutes by Shone (1 Jan 1934), Howe (1 Jan), Collier (1 Jan) and Oliphant (2 Jan); Chilston to FO, tel 524, 30 Dec 1933, FO 371/18297/N2/2/38.

way and talk of “far wider and more important things”, might ‘refer to a desire for closer relations with us’. Both Collier and Howe agreed, although the former doubted that the Soviets would be willing to ‘incur the military obligations’ of a pact with France.<sup>21</sup> Collier also contended that Britain and Soviet Russia, ‘whether they like it or not, will find themselves, for the next year or so at least, in the same camp, as far as the fundamentals of foreign policy are concerned’.<sup>22</sup> Even the always-suspicious Oliphant agreed: ‘If the Soviet were to run straight, no harm would arise from being in the same camp. If they feel menaced by Japan in the East or Germany in the West, it is quite on the cards that they will run straight with us.’

During January 1934, as the final touches were put on the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement, Soviet policy was much discussed by British policy makers.<sup>23</sup> Reporting on Litvinov’s speech of 29 December, Chilston noted that some felt that it adumbrated an understanding between Soviet Russia, France and the Little Entente. Chilston, too, believed that the Soviets were willing to ‘experiment’ with such a grouping ‘to tide [themselves] over the present crisis’ caused by the hostility of Japan and Germany. The ambassador’s interpretation was broadly shared at the Foreign Office. In fact, Howe was optimistic that the policy change was more far-reaching:

I think we can take it that the USSR has definitely oriented her new ‘sentimental’ policy towards France and Poland. It is a development which will undoubtedly have far-reaching results, at any rate in Europe. We ourselves may have to take off our gloves when shaking hands with the Bolsheviks.

Oliphant was similarly bullish, feeling that the Soviets might soon join the League in a move to protect themselves against Germany and Japan.

Vansittart speculated about the significance for Britain of the new Soviet policy.<sup>24</sup> Moscow’s motive was clear to the PUS: ‘Fear – genuine fear and not the sham (it has) for years served out about capitalistic attacks impending – is most evidently a most healthy medicine in Russia.’ However, he thought, Britain should let Soviet Russia ‘make its own running’. Changes in Soviet foreign policy, the PUS pontificated, would likely come about as a result of Japan’s ‘increasing her [Russia’s] fear’. In

<sup>21</sup> See also ‘Franco-Soviet Relations’, Collier, 5 Dec 1933, FO 371/17257/N8705/232/38.

<sup>22</sup> See also; Collier’s minute (25 Jan) on Chilston to FO, disp 23, 15 Jan 1934, FO 371/18298/N472/2/38.

<sup>23</sup> This and the following paragraphs derive from Chilston to FO, disp 5, 2 Jan 1934, FO 371/18297/N140/2/38, and minutes: Shone, Howe, Collier (all 9 Jan), Oliphant (11 Jan) and Vansittart (13 Jan).

<sup>24</sup> Simon Bourette-Knowles, ‘The Global Micawber: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Treasury and the Global Balance of Power, 1933–1935’, *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 91–121.

the meantime, Britain's most profitable move would be to determine 'what result in the Far East – next to a draw – would be the best for the world (including us) and why'. The PUS added that he felt that it would be 'a positive misfortune' if Soviet Russia joined the League 'before she has settled her differences with Japan', as such a move 'w[oul]d only lead the League into further difficulty & discredit'. He also argued that the French were 'blind if they think Russia will be of any material use to them vis à vis of Germany until she is relieved on her eastern flank'.

Concern about Soviet foreign policy was logically linked to concern about Soviet strength.<sup>25</sup> As seen above, an evaluation of Soviet strength and intentions had been put off in 1931. It was not until October 1933 that the COS decided to prepare a joint report on the state of Soviet armaments,<sup>26</sup> and it was January 1934 when they finally delivered it.<sup>27</sup> The chiefs were impressed by both the industrial effort put into the Soviet armed forces and its results, but added that they lacked the information 'to assess either the technical proficiency or the fighting value of this new material'.<sup>28</sup> At the Foreign Office this also reinforced views about the new Soviet foreign policy. Soviet Russia was 'adequately equipped to sustain a war on one front but not on two. Hence their anxiety to safeguard their western frontier, in the event of a war against Japan, by concluding pacts of non-aggression with all the border states in eastern Europe.'<sup>29</sup>

Throughout January, there were further reports about Soviet foreign policy. From Berlin, Phipps reported that Constantin von Neurath, the German foreign minister, had dismissed Soviet fears of Germany as 'a bad attack of nerves'.<sup>30</sup> Reports of worsening Russo-German relations also emanated from Geneva, where Eden reported Italian distress at this occurrence.<sup>31</sup> This gave Collier a certain amount of grim amusement.

<sup>25</sup> And also to attempts to overcome German reluctance and re-vitalize the disarmament talks; see the correspondence between Vansittart and Hankey, 29 Dec 1933–3 Jan 1934, and Vansittart and Montgomery-Massingberd, 28 Dec 1933–8 Jan 1934, all Cab 21/387.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes, 114th meeting COS, 14 Oct 1933, Cab 53/4; Hodsoll to Hankey, 24 Oct 1933, Cab 21/404.

<sup>27</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 7, 2 Jan 1934, FO 371/18322/N157/157/38; 'Russian Preparations for War', CID 1127-B, COS, 17 Jan 1934, Cab 4/22.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. 'The [Soviet] Armament Industry (including aircraft)', ICF 313, 12 Sept 1933, and 'Industrial Mobilisation', secret, D. Morton (IIC), 17 Nov 1933, both Cab 21/395; 'Air Ministry Note on Russian Preparations for War', ns, nd [c. mid-Oct 1933], Air 9/58; 'Memorandum on Industrial Mobilisation in the USSR. Prepared at the Request of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', E. F. Crowe, 14 Dec 1933, Cab 48/4.

<sup>29</sup> FO 371/18301/N489/4/38, Shone's minute (25 Jan).

<sup>30</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 7, 8 Jan 1934, FO 371/18315/N176/53/38, minutes, Howe and Collier (9 Jan).

<sup>31</sup> Patteson (consul, Geneva) to FO, tel 4 LN, 15 Jan 1934, FO 371/18315/N309/53/38, minutes, Howe and Collier (16 Jan).

He noted that ‘the Italians have “run with the hare and hunted with the hounds” for so long that they are appalled at the prospect of having to choose between the Germans and the Russians – the revisionists and the anti-revisionists’. The Italians were also concerned by talk of a Franco-Soviet *rapprochement*, arguing that this could trigger German fears of encirclement and some ‘desperate act’ by Berlin. They enquired as to the British attitude.<sup>32</sup> Collier saw no reason why the British should, as the Italians seemed to imply by their enquiry, ‘pull their [the Italians’] chestnuts out of the fire’ by making any effort to influence the course of events. Vansittart dismissed the Italian concerns as merely part of their attempt to keep a foot in ‘not two camps but three’. It was clear that the rumblings from Moscow had major implications for European politics.

All of this also was germane to the continued discussions in the DRC on 30 January. Here, Vansittart, in light of the German–Polish agreement of 26 January, again aired his opinions about Germany’s sinister intentions.<sup>33</sup> He reiterated that Germany posed the major threat to Britain, and added that ‘it was notorious that the Germans were not actuated by reason in their foreign relations’. As for the Japanese, he doubted that they wanted to create bad relations with Britain, since the former ‘expected a show down with Russia before very long and they were always afraid that, in that event, America would turn on them’. Fisher took this opportunity to interject that the present was a good time to attempt to establish better relations with Japan, but Hankey headed this off by bringing the meeting to a close.<sup>34</sup>

A first draft of the DRC’s findings was ready on 19 February, and a revised first draft was considered a week later.<sup>35</sup> The final version was not issued until 28 February.<sup>36</sup> It is essential to consider the construction of both the draft and the final report. First, Fisher wrote to Hankey complaining strongly that the views of the permanent secretary to the Treasury regarding the United States – ‘*the worst of our defence deficiencies is our entanglement with the USA*’ – had been omitted.<sup>37</sup> Subservience to

<sup>32</sup> Drummond to Sargent, 13 Jan 1934, FO 371/18298/N478/2/38, minutes: Collier (nd, but 26 Jan) and Vansittart (27 Jan).

<sup>33</sup> For the German–Polish agreement, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany* (2 vols.; Chicago and London, 1970–80), I, 57–73.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, 9th meeting DRC, 30 Jan 1934, Cab 16/109.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, 11th and 12th meetings DRC, 19 and 26 Feb 1934, Cab 16/109.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Committee of Imperial Defence. Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report’, DRC 14, Hankey, Chatfield, Ellington, Fisher, Montgomery-Massingberd and Vansittart, 28 Feb 1934, Cab 16/109.

<sup>37</sup> Fisher to Hankey, 17 Feb 1934, Cab 21/434; see ‘Note by Sir Warren Fisher as an addendum to the Defence Requirements Committee Report’, DRC 19, 17 Feb 1934, Cab 16/109, for a fuller explanation.

the United States, Fisher argued, had prevented Britain from following the logical policy of improving Anglo-Japanese relations (and, not incidentally, being able to reduce naval spending). Hankey managed to soothe Fisher's ruffled feelings by promising that there would be other opportunities to raise the American question in future.<sup>38</sup> Vansittart was unhappy about a proposed last-second change by the chief of the Air Staff, wherein the latter stated that he could not provide sufficient aircraft for both home defence against Germany and an expeditionary force to the continent. Vansittart felt that this threw everything 'into the melting pot' – a clear indication of the emphasis that the PUS put on the German menace.<sup>39</sup> Only Chatfield, whose service interests were nearly completely satisfied by the DRC Report, wrote to congratulate Hankey for his efforts.<sup>40</sup>

The DRC's final report was a clear victory for Hankey and the service chiefs, and not for Vansittart and Fisher, as is sometimes thought.<sup>41</sup> This latter, mistaken view comes from hindsight and Hankey's clever drafting. Vansittart and Fisher's obsession with the German menace was catered to by adding the phrase that Germany was Britain's 'ultimate potential enemy';<sup>42</sup> Fisher's dislike of American influence, especially as it seemingly blocked a *rapprochement* with Japan, was covered by a simple mention of the difficulties caused by the United States and a commitment to searching for an 'ultimate policy of accommodation and friendship with Japan'. This wording allowed the insertion of Vansittart's remark that Japan would become hostile to Britain only if Britain were involved elsewhere: 'And elsewhere meant Europe, and danger to us in Europe will only come from Germany.'

However, the DRC was not meant primarily to deal with long-range planning and speculation, but with the immediate reality of defence deficiencies. Here, little had changed. The priorities of the Annual

<sup>38</sup> Hankey to Fisher, 17 and 20 Feb 1934, and Fisher's reply Cab 21/434.

<sup>39</sup> Norton (for Vansittart) to Hankey, 1 Mar 1934, Vansittart to Hankey, 6 Mar 1934, and reply, 6 Mar 1934, all Cab 21/434.

<sup>40</sup> Chatfield to Hankey, 28 Feb 1934, Cab 21/434.

<sup>41</sup> D. C. Watt, 'Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament Against Germany', in D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (South Bend, IN, 1965), 100–6. This argument is reiterated by G. C. Peden, 'Sir Warren Fisher and British Rearmament Against Germany', *EHR*, 94 (1979), esp. 32–3; Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 28–32; Charles Morrissey and R. A. Ramsay, "'Giving a Lead in the Right Direction": Sir Robert Vansittart and the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee', *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 39–60; and B. J. C. McKercher, *Transition of Power. Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States 1930–1945* (Cambridge, 1999), 179. Neilson, 'Defence Requirements Committee', rebuts.

<sup>42</sup> The remainder of this paragraph and the following one, except where indicated, are based on sources in n. 36.



Review of 1933, now called ‘contingencies’, remained the guiding principles. The Far East was placed first and Germany second. The third item, the defence of India, was subsumed in the second, since ‘if the deficiencies are made good to meet the German menace, the requirements for the defence of India can be met’. Thus vanished one of the long-standing issues of imperial defence, although it was raised sporadically until the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup> Despite this, one of Britain’s principal concerns still remained Soviet Russia. This resulted from the fact that Moscow potentially had a major impact on the policies of both Tokyo and Berlin. Thus, to contain the Japanese and German threats, Britain had to consider both Soviet–Japanese and German–Soviet relations. Anglo–Soviet relations could never be determined in isolation, but rather as part of British policy generally.

Much thinking about this occurred at the Foreign Office. By January, the studies on policy in the Far East that Vansittart had commissioned earlier were ready.<sup>44</sup> Orde asserted that British interests in the Far East required a prosperous, but not strong China. He believed that Soviet Russia ‘is the power with which Japan is most likely to enter into armed conflict and against which she must protect herself’, whereas Japan had less to gain in a quarrel with either Britain or the United States. Besides, ‘the Russian strategic position north and east of Manchukuo will greatly hamper her [Japan] in undertaking warlike adventures against other Great Powers’. He recommended that increasing British strength in the Far East was the best means of ensuring Britain’s interests and that to attempt to come to terms with Japan would encourage its aggressive behaviour in China and worsen Anglo–American and Anglo–Chinese relations.

Pratt echoed these assessments. He argued that there was ‘bitter enmity’ between Moscow and Tokyo over such matters as the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER).<sup>45</sup> With ‘a hostile Russia on her flank’ and the likelihood that in any Russo–Japanese struggle the United States would ‘back Soviet Russia by any means short of actually taking the field’, Japan was unlikely to attack British interests in the Far East. William Connor Green, who had been posted successively to Tokyo and Peking

<sup>43</sup> R. A. Johnson, “‘Russians at the Gates of India’? Planning the Defence of India, 1885–1900”, *JMilH*, 67, 3 (2003), 697–744; Milan Hauner, ‘The Soviet Threat to Afghanistan and India 1938–1940’, *MAS*, 15, 2 (1982), 287–309.

<sup>44</sup> ‘The Situation in the Far East (Memoranda) 1933–34’, 16 Jan 1934, FO 371/18160/F295/295/61; circulated to the DRC after 24 Feb 1934 as DRC 20, Cab 16/109, and to the Cabinet as CP 77(34). Authors identified in the text.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce A. Elleman, ‘The Soviet Union’s Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924–1925’, *JAS*, 53, 2 (1994), 459–86.



in the 1920s, argued that logic dictated that, since Japan and Soviet Russia each 'had their hands full', war between them '*ought* therefore to be unthinkable'. However, logic did not necessarily enter into the matter, as both Japan's sense of destiny and Soviet *amour propre* were involved. Broadly, he felt that Japan's ambitions in the Far East would be satisfied by the acquisition of Manchuria and that Soviet Russia could do little to thwart this, something reflected by Soviet Russia's making an offer in June 1933 to sell the CER to Japan. Given this, he suggested that Britain might do well not to prevent Tokyo's acquiring Manchuria, as that acquisition might turn Japan into a satiated state and hence no longer a threat to Soviet Russia.

By the beginning of February, the Far Eastern Department had also decided whether a Russo-Japanese war was likely and what was the best result for Britain of such a conflict.<sup>46</sup> That department believed that a Russo-Japanese war was not imminent. Only in the future, when Japan's rearmament programme was finished, was an advance likely, although the incompatibility of Japanese and communist 'imperialisms' meant that there would be constant tension between the two. The benefit of this 'mutual fear' was 'rather better behaviour in the international sphere' from both states. As to war, the Far Eastern Department examined two possible outcomes: a decisive Japanese victory and a decisive Soviet victory. The former was preferable. A Japanese victory would result in Tokyo's 'aggressive power' being reduced while it digested the Soviet possessions in the Far East. Japan would have insufficient strength to conquer China, and 'would not constitute a direct danger to British interests'. A Soviet victory was viewed as disastrous. Defeated Japan would suffer social upheaval, 'a desperate anarchic communism' would likely follow and 'Japan would sink for some considerable time to the position of a third-class Power.' The ensuing vacuum would be filled by a triumphant Soviet Russia, which would be 'a serious menace to British interests throughout Asia'.

Collier criticized this analysis. He contended that neither possibility was likely. Collier argued that the best that Soviet Russia could manage in a war with Japan was a 'successful defensive' and that, therefore, any war would likely be initiated by Japan.<sup>47</sup> For Collier, that made Japan the threat. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Comintern, 'the Soviet Government have made it clear that they wish no change in the existing

<sup>46</sup> This paragraph is based on 'Memorandum on Russo-Japanese Tension', A. W. G. Randall (FED), 9 Feb 1934, FO 371/18176/F823/316/23, and minutes.

<sup>47</sup> Compare the War Office views in 'A Review of the Far Eastern Situation', Lt-Col E. G. Miles, GSO(1), MI 2(c), 31 Dec 1933, WO 106/5396.

frontiers'. Since Japan aimed at dominating China, Collier felt that Britain should co-operate with Soviet Russia. As he concluded:

No one . . . could accuse me of any undue fondness for the Soviet Government as such; but I feel that we must take the facts as we find them, and that, since we live among a number of Powers, few of whom really wish us well but some of whom have the same interests as ourselves, we should, whenever possible, encourage the latter to join with us in defending the *status quo* against those whose interests (in their own view) demand its overthrow.

This was a clear indication of Collier's position and his acceptance of the new Soviet policy put forward by Litvinov.

Collier's analysis drew support from Ralph Wigram, who had just replaced Sargent as the head of the Central Department.<sup>48</sup> Wigram's interest in Russia was with regard to Europe. He pointed out that 'Russia – during the last 60 years at least – has been one of the chief counterweights to Germany in Europe.' After 1918, 'common revisionist hopes' had seemingly thrown Soviet Russia and Germany together, 'but already the covetous eye which Germany turns on Russia, and French hopes to use Russia against Germany . . . seem definitely to have checked this tendency'. For these reasons, Soviet Russia's role in Europe was the key to the situation for Wigram. Thus, he rejected the Far Eastern Department's contention that a Soviet defeat would be preferable to a Japanese one, and favoured Collier's anticipation of a draw: 'I cannot see that – by a crushing defeat or indeed any defeat in the East – we can hope to see Russia weakened further in Europe. On the contrary it seems to me essential that she should again appear there as a counter weight to Germany.'

The final words belonged to Vansittart and Simon. The PUS accepted the view that the optimal result for Britain would be a 'draw', but, bowing to the arguments outlined above, noted that 'the choice w[oul]d be between the two evils' of either a Soviet or a Japanese victory. In fact, as 'tension [between the two] produces good, or better, behaviour . . . it is in our interest that there should be tension but no blows as long as possible'.<sup>49</sup> Simon's view was contrary. The foreign secretary accepted 'much' of the Far Eastern Department's analysis. However, he worried that Japan would 'digest' Manchuria more quickly than the Far Eastern Department anticipated and 'be ready for another meal' in three to four

<sup>48</sup> The remainder of this and the following two paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on sources in n. 46.

<sup>49</sup> This remained Vansittart's view; see his minute (25 May) on Cadogan (ambassador, China) to FO, disp 27 TS, 23 Mar 1934, FO 371/18147/F2899/2899/10; Mounsey to Cadogan, 31 May 1934, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/293.

years. He also felt that Japan would defeat Soviet Russia in any war and that 'the rapidity with which that victory is achieved may well startle many people'. And, harkening back to the fears that were current during 1904 and 1905, he suggested that Soviet Russia might 'try to regain caste' after a defeat by turning 'southwards towards Afghanistan & Persia . . . not a very pleasant prospect for us'.<sup>50</sup>

But was a Soviet-Japanese war likely and what did other departments think? In early 1934, there was substantial discussion at both the War Office and Admiralty. The British naval attaché at Tokyo believed that, both from the political and military points of view, Japan 'is in no position to go to war now'. Unless the 'young military officers', who 'are undoubtedly in favour of striking now', could exert a decisive influence, he believed that war would not occur 'for three or four years'. The director of military operations and intelligence (DMO&I) at the War Office, Major General J. G. Dill, agreed, and noted that Soviet Russia was 'even less ready to start an aggressive war than Japan, though, like the latter, she will fight hard if attacked'. As to which country would emerge victorious in a future war, the Admiralty had no doubts. 'The moment the best combination of circumstances shows itself – it may be this year or in 2 or 3', the director of naval intelligence (DNI) opined, 'they [the Japanese] will act quickly & God help the Bolos. [Bolsheviks]!'<sup>51</sup>

The Foreign Office settled down to observe events. One complication in Anglo-Soviet relations was solved on 16 February with the signing of a new Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement.<sup>52</sup> This was accompanied by hints from Soviet Russia that the agreement might usher in an Anglo-Soviet non-aggression pact or that Britain might now sponsor the entry of Soviet Russia into the League.<sup>53</sup> The latter was unlikely, but there was a feeling that Soviet Russia would utilize third parties in an attempt to secure British support for Moscow's entry into the League. Vansittart noted resignedly that 'if these three powers [France, Poland and Italy] are going to put Russia up, we sh[oul]d not oppose it, & must even feign

<sup>50</sup> For background, see Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995), 106. For Simon's fears, see Cab 5(34), minutes, 14 Feb 1934; Cab 23/78, and 'Policy in regard to Afghanistan. Joint Memorandum by Sir J. Simon . . . and Sir S. Hoare . . .', CP 33(34), 2 Feb 1934, Cab 24/247; 'Policy in Regard to Afghanistan. Memorandum by Lord Hailsham (Secretary of State for War)', CP 36(34), 8 Feb 1934, Cab 24/247.

<sup>51</sup> J. P. Vivian (naval attaché, Tokyo) to Rear Adm. G. C. Dickens (DNI, Adm), 19 Jan 1934, Dickens to Maj.-Gen. J. G. Dill (DMO&I, WO), 20 Feb 1934, Dill's reply, 28 Feb 1934, and Dickens to Dill, 1 Mar 1934, all WO 106/5499.

<sup>52</sup> Approved at Cabinet, 31 Jan 1934, Cab 3(34), Cab 23/78.

<sup>53</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 19, 17 Feb 1934, FO 371/18303/N1069/16/38.

pleasure, though I still think that it will do no good to the League & only be an embarrassment vis à vis of Japan certainly & Germany possibly'.<sup>54</sup> But, certainly there was no doubt at the Foreign Office that the various Soviet actions meant that '1934 thus sees the Soviet Government bent on securing admission to the councils of the Great Powers.' There also was little doubt as to Soviet motive: 'their main incentive, however, is not prestige, but self-protection. Faced with the possibility of war in the Far East, they must do their utmost to insure themselves against the risk of attack in Europe.'<sup>55</sup> The Soviets were also thought to oppose any improvement of relations among the other Powers, including any acceptance of the disarmament proposals involving Japan and Germany. As Shone put it:

They dislike the prospect of any *rapprochement* between Germany and the Western Powers, not only because they feel that Germany's gaze would then be fixed more firmly than ever on the east, but because their fear and hatred of Germany is such that if *she* were friends with the Western Powers, *they* could not be; they would then be isolated again and unable to count on the support of the Powers against German aggression – the only support which is of use to them until they are strong enough to deal with Germany (and perhaps simultaneously with Japan) by themselves.<sup>56</sup>

Rumours and reports of an imminent Soviet application to the League continued throughout the spring, with Britain's refusing to be drawn on the subject.<sup>57</sup> Vansittart was suspicious of Soviet motives: 'I have always considered that it would be a dubious advantage to the League if Russia joined, before she had liquidated her troubles with Japan. It might end with positive disadvantage to the League. Russia w[oul]d be

<sup>54</sup> Loraine (ambassador, Angora) to FO, 22 Feb 1934, FO 371/18303/N1316/16/38; Loraine to Simon, 22 Feb 1934, FO 371/18303/N1617/16/38, minute. An opposing interpretation to what follows is Michael Jabara Carley, "'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances": The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934–1936', *CEH*, 5, 1 (1996), 34–42.

<sup>55</sup> Quotations from 'Memorandum on the Pacts of Non-Aggression and the Conventions for the Definition of Aggression negotiated by the USSR during 1933', T. Shone and P. F. Grey (both ND), 14 Feb 1934, FO 371/18080/N1215/224/63.

<sup>56</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 122, 13 March 1934, FO 371/185211/W2617/1/98 and Shone's minute (28 Mar).

<sup>57</sup> Tyrrell (ambassador, Paris) to FO, disp 90, 20 Mar 1934, FO 371/18298/N1741/2/38; Gilbert Murray (LNU) to Simon, 15 Mar 1934, FO 371/18298/N1754/2/38; Walters (undersecretary general, L of N) to Strang, 16 Mar 1934, FO 371/18298/N1823/2/38; Cecil to Simon, 29 Mar 1934, Simon Papers, FO 800/289; Chilston to FO, tel 48, 31 Mar 1934, FO 371/18298/N1935/2/38; Walters to Strang, 29 Mar 1934, FO 371/18298/N2114/2/38; Loraine to FO, tel 25, 4 Apr 1934, FO 371/18298/N2159/2/38; British Delegation (Geneva) to FO, 12 Apr 1934, disp 34, FO 371/18298/N2235/2/38; FO minute, 12 April 1934, FO 371/18298/N2393/2/38.

joining not for love of the League, but for what she might be able to get out of it.’<sup>58</sup>

But all considerations of Soviet Russia were entangled with both the Cabinet’s reception of the DRC Report (with its implications for Anglo-Japanese relations) and the ongoing disarmament talks (with their implications for Anglo-German relations).<sup>59</sup> On 14 March and again on 19 March, the Cabinet had considered the DRC Report, and Chamberlain had made another pitch for *rapprochement* with Japan as a means of sharply cutting back the defence estimates.<sup>60</sup> The chancellor continued to push this line in various committees, including the one set up to establish the British position for the forthcoming naval disarmament conference.<sup>61</sup> Two weeks later, at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Disarmament, Chamberlain reiterated this argument.<sup>62</sup> However, he faced a barrage of *caveats* ranging from Japan’s appetite in China to the legalities of abrogating the Nine-Power Treaty if negotiations with Japan were undertaken. This attack was repeated a few days later.<sup>63</sup> Given this high-level attempt to advocate a pro-Japanese policy contrary to the Foreign Office’s best advice, Collier was annoyed by any emissions from the British Embassy in Tokyo that encouraged such efforts. ‘I do not share the assumption’, he minuted sharply, ‘on which the Tokyo Embassy seem habitually to proceed in all matters – viz. that our “true interests” must always be pro-Japanese.’<sup>64</sup> And, on another dispatch contending that Soviet strength was largely a mirage, he concluded that: ‘I venture to think that this bears out my view that Japan is

<sup>58</sup> Minute, Vansittart, 26 March 1934, FO 371/18298/N1977/2/38.

<sup>59</sup> Dick Richardson, ‘The Geneva Disarmament Conference, 1932–1934’, in D. Richardson and G. Stone, eds., *Decisions and Diplomacy. Essays in Twentieth-Century International History* (London and New York, 1995), 60–82; Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching, ‘Britain and the World Disarmament Conference’, in P. Catterall with C. J. Morris, eds., *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918–1945* (London and New York, 1993), 35–56; Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament 1919–1934* (London, 1999), 164–73; and Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference* (Basingstoke and New York, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, Cab 9(34), 14 Mar 1934 and Cab 10(34), 19 March 1934, both Cab 23/78.

<sup>61</sup> NCM (35), minutes 1st meeting, 16 Apr 1934, Cab 29/147; N. Chamberlain diary entry, 20 Apr 1934, Chamberlain Papers, NC 2/23A.

<sup>62</sup> DC(M) 32, minutes 40th meeting, 1 May 1934, Cab 27/506.

<sup>63</sup> DC(M) 32, minutes 41st meeting, 3 May 1934, Cab 27/506; rebuttal by the Adm of Chamberlain’s arguments, ‘The Naval Conference, 1935. Note by the First Lord of the Admiralty’, NCM(35) 10, most secret, Eyres Monsell, 18 May 1935; the FO’s objections, ‘Anglo-Japanese Relations and the Question of Naval Parity’, NCM(35) 8, most secret, FO, 23 May 1934: both Cab 29/148.

<sup>64</sup> Minute, Collier (26 May) on Dodd (Tokyo) to FO, tel 127, 25 May 1934, FO 371/18298/N3103/38.

more dangerous to us in Asia than Russia can be for many years to come.<sup>65</sup>

At this same time, the situation regarding Soviet Russia and the League became more complicated. Litvinov arrived in Geneva on 18 May. The next day Eden reported that the Soviet minister had not come to make soundings about joining the League or about disarmament; rather, he wished to negotiate a pact of mutual assistance with France and its eastern European allies – an ‘Eastern Locarno’.<sup>66</sup> This triggered a discussion of the very underpinnings of British strategic defence policy. These deliberations were only marginally about Soviet Russia, but are essential to consider, as they make evident the contending currents of thought and considerations about the future direction of British policy, including towards Moscow.

Allen Leeper, the head of the League of Nations and Western Department, argued that the French policy of alliances would lead to a division of Europe into power blocs as before 1914. This would push Britain into a ‘policy of isolationism’, and would ‘eventually force us to revive the unpopular policy of an entente not only with France but with Russia’. Leeper, who shared his brother Rex’s dislike of the Bolsheviks, worried about what he saw as Britain’s ‘insular’ tendencies.<sup>67</sup> ‘We in this country are drifting further and further away from collective action’, he wrote. ‘The immediate result will be the diminution of the power of the League of Nations which Russia’s adhesion (what a member!) will not counterbalance.’

There were divided opinions. Collier felt Leeper’s vision ‘too tragic a view of the situation’. He contended that an ‘Eastern Locarno’ would

<sup>65</sup> Minute, Collier (17 May) on Charles (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, disp 220, 8 May 1934, FO 371/18098/F2797/107/10.

<sup>66</sup> This paragraph and four following ones, except where indicated, based on Patteson (consul, Geneva) for Eden to FO, tel 19, FO 371/18298/N2973/2/38; Collier’s minute (22 May) and untitled memo by Allen Leeper (head, L of N and Western Department, FO), 23 May 1934, FO 371/18527/W5693/1/98; minutes, Collier (23 May), Craigie (24 May), Wigram (24 May), E. H. Carr (25 May), Sargent (29 May), Mounsey (6 Jun) and Simon (7 Jun). For earlier Franco-Soviet talks, see Lisanne Radice, ‘The Eastern Pact, 1933–1935: A Last Attempt at European Co-operation’, *SEER*, 55, 1 (1977), 47–9; Donald N. Lammers, ‘Britain, Russia, and the Revival of “Entente Diplomacy”: 1934’, *JBS*, 6, 2 (1967), 99–123; and Rolf Ahmann, “‘Localization of Conflicts” or “Indivisibility of Peace”: The German and the Soviet Approaches Towards Collective Security and East Central Europe 1925–1939’, in R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke, and M. Howard, eds., *The Quest for Stability. Problems of West European Security 1918–1957* (Oxford, 1993), 201–47.

<sup>67</sup> See Keith Neilson, “‘That elusive entity British policy in Russia’: The Impact of Russia on British Policy at the Paris Peace Conference”, in M. Dockrill and J. Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Peace Without Victory?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), 67–101.

not come about unless Germany were willing to join, as, without Berlin's consent, none of the east European nations would dare enter a grouping so manifestly anti-German. Hence, Collier suggested that Litvinov's proposal was simply designed to force Germany into rejecting such a pact, thus revealing 'German [aggressive] intentions'. Nor did he think that Leeper's 'alternative to a policy of isolation and drift – viz. an alliance with France and Belgium' – would be acceptable to 'public opinion in this country . . . until the danger from Germany had become much more apparent than it is now'. Craigie argued that isolationism, 'provided that the country is prepared to foot an adequate defence bill', was not a bad policy, since he felt that the attempts at building blocs were 'temporary'. As someone deeply immersed in the naval limitations discussions with the United States and Japan, he saw the issue in another context. He advocated 'cultivating the best possible relations with the US and Japan' as a means of 'preventing Japan from drifting into the German orbit – a serious possibility if there is to be a real Franco-Russian entente'.

Wigram's position was simple. 'I do not believe in any heroic solution on policy', he offered, 'but simply in the quiet and methodical building up of our own armed strength.' Only such force would make Germany 'reflect' on its policy, 'discourage' the Italians from joining the Germans and 'encourage' the French to continue their policy of maintaining sufficient armed force and alliances to contain Berlin. Wigram argued:

Do not let us discourage France in the pursuit of that policy. It may well be an essential makeshift pending the building up of our own strength. Once that task is well in hand, France will be able to see if the British alliance is better than that of Russia. At that time too (if Germany is still in her present temper) the time will have come to talk about guarantees; for when we are in a position to fulfil a guarantee, we shall be able to enact our own terms for its giving.

Orme Sargent took a broader view. He argued that the post-war Anglo-French hegemony in Europe was 'coming to an end' and was being replaced by 'some system of balance founded on direct Franco-German rivalry'. He preferred that Britain should 'participate' in the new arrangement in order to 'exercise a moderating influence both on France and Germany thus preventing a reversion to the crude *Macht Politik* of the pre-war era'. However, like Collier, he was not convinced that public opinion would support such a policy. 'If, however', he wrote, 'as seems more probable, we decide on a policy of isolationism, we must resign ourselves to an uncontrolled orgy of nationalism and militarism in all their various forms', a policy that would not make the British either

‘popular or respected’ by others, and leave Britain ‘without a friend in the world’, to its detriment.

A second assistant undersecretary, George Mounsey, rejected Sargent’s contentions. For Mounsey, ‘so long as the League of Nations is in being we cannot envisage our isolation, in the old sense of the term’, and the pre-1914 political situation in Europe had gone forever. He preferred a policy of caution (or, possibly, muddling through):

It is in such transitional conditions idle to speculate too far ahead, but I should imagine that our immediate task will be to avoid all unnecessary continental commitments while we are strengthening and cementing the tenuous ties connecting the reorganised British Empire, at the same time that we must through the League or otherwise, maintain sufficient connection – without alliance – with our Continental neighbours to enable us to influence the balance of power between them in the right direction.

Not surprisingly, Simon agreed with Mounsey. The foreign secretary, though, ‘place[d] a lower value on the League of Nations’ than did his assistant undersecretary. A return to pre-1914 isolationism was unlikely, but the “‘man in the street”” wanted ‘no more commitments unless he sees an adequate quid pro quo’. Thus, British policy, ‘for the time being’ should be ‘to hold ourselves free, but to go in for some re-armament’. Only then could London be in the position that Wigram advocated.

Further news from Geneva spoke directly to these concerns. There, on 30 May, Louis Barthou, the French foreign minister, denounced any acceptance of German rearmament, effectively ending the Disarmament Conference (it adjourned, *sine die*, on 11 June). The speech was also a blow to Anglo-French relations. Vansittart was sorrowful: the French would ‘have been willing to trade German rearmament against a [British] guarantee’ of their security had the British the capacity to provide it. Sargent contended that Barthou’s speech was an ‘ominous indication that the Franco-Russian agreement has gone a good deal further than we had thought’,<sup>68</sup> with the French now seeking security from Moscow rather than from Britain, a view that Leeper shared.<sup>69</sup>

This is not to say that the British opposed ‘a real Eastern Locarno’. Mounsey, in fact, felt that if ‘Germany–France, Poland and Soviet Russia’ could sign such an agreement it ‘would be a step in the right

<sup>68</sup> Patteson (Geneva) to FO, tel 33 LN, 30 May 1934, FO 371/18526/W5206/1/98 minutes, Sargent and Vansittart (both 1 Jun); Vansittart to Cadogan, 16 Jun 1934, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/293.

<sup>69</sup> His minute (4 Jun) on British delegation, Geneva, to FO, tel 67, 1 Jun 1934, FO 371/18526/W5331/1/98.



direction for bringing back some measures of world confidence'.<sup>70</sup> Others, however, differed. Those with a particular interest in disarmament and affairs at Geneva were upset. Eden was convinced that 'the French and their satellites are anxious to turn this [Disarmament] Conference into a "Security" Conference, the outward object of which will be to create "Locarnos" in various parts of Europe, but the real purpose of which would be the encirclement of Germany'.<sup>71</sup> MacDonald echoed Eden: the 'French have no clear policy though coquetting with Russia & with it toying with the dangerous game of trying to isolate Germany with Eastern Locarnos'.<sup>72</sup>

The French were at pains to dispel these fears. Barthou informed the British that the Franco-Soviet discussions did not stem from a fear that Britain could no longer provide France with security, but resulted from a belief that any reconciliation with Germany was impossible. The Soviets had proposed a Franco-Soviet alliance in 1932 when Herriot had visited Soviet Russia, but the French had persuaded Moscow instead to pursue a collectivist approach. Barthou termed the proposal 'an honest attempt to contribute to peace in Europe' and suggested that it might be followed up by a Mediterranean Locarno.<sup>73</sup> The British were wary. They favoured Germany's joining an Eastern Locarno, but they were not willing to participate themselves or to give advice. This was for a variety of reasons: because they were not an eastern European power, because Britain had stated at Geneva that it was not in favour of 'regional pacts', because Germany might resent any advice from London and because Britain had, in Sargent's words, 'no desire to take part in a Mediterranean Locarno any more than an Eastern Locarno'.<sup>74</sup> Some, like Eden, were bitter about the French initiative: 'I cannot shake off the conviction – shared I believe by the great majority of my fellow countrymen' – Eden noted a month later, 'that it is the Barthous of this world who have made Hitler inevitable'.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Minutes, A. Leeper (4 Jun) and Mounsey (5 Jun) on UK delegation (Geneva) to FO, tel 67, 1 Jun 1934, FO 371/18526/W5331/1/98.

<sup>71</sup> Eden to Baldwin, 3 Jun 1934, Eden Papers, AP 14/1/256.

<sup>72</sup> Diary entry, 9 Jun 1934, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/60/1753/1.

<sup>73</sup> Clerk (ambassador, Paris) to FO, tel 159, 14 Jun 1934, FO 371/17746/C3679/247/18, and Clerk to FO, disp 994, 14 Jun 1934, FO 371/17746/C3680/247/18, enclosing 'Memorandum by Mr Collier on the Soviet Non-Aggression Treaties', 14 Jun 1934, with minutes, esp. Sargent (18 Jun).

<sup>74</sup> For debate, see A. Leeper's minute (18 Jun), Sargent's riposte (18 Jun) and Vansittart's support for the latter (19 Jun), on Phipps to FO, tel 126, 15 Jun 1934, FO 371/17747/C3743/247/18.

<sup>75</sup> Eden's minute (1 Aug) on his conversation with Hugh Wilson (US minister at Geneva), 18 Jul 1934, FO 371/17749/C5313/247/18.

While this debate was going on, throughout June and early July, the French and Soviets attempted to press the British towards the acceptance of the idea of an Eastern Locarno.<sup>76</sup> Neither Collier nor Vansittart was impressed. The former noted that ‘Litvinov’s idea of “better political relations with Great Britain” seems to be that we should actively support his pact proposals’, and pointed out that the proposal was ‘really useless’ unless Germany could be ‘induced to join’.<sup>77</sup> On 3 July, the PUS refused to accept Maisky’s allegations that Britain was attempting both to incite a Russo-Japanese conflict and to block the formation of an Eastern Locarno. Instead, the PUS took advantage of the opportunity to give the ambassador an outline of what he termed Britain’s ‘perfectly clear (and ego-centric)’ policy.<sup>78</sup> Vansittart chastised Maisky for attempting to ‘blackguard’ Britain with propaganda and defamatory public utterances. ‘In short’, the PUS told Chilston, ‘the Soviet Government cannot have it both ways; and they must now choose between a policy of real friendship with us in all respects and the policy they have been pursuing hitherto.’<sup>79</sup>

Consultation with the French was required. On 9 and 10 July, Barthou met with Simon to discuss the Eastern Pact.<sup>80</sup> Barthou outlined the earlier negotiations and emphasized two things: a desire to work loyally and openly with the British and a hope that Soviet Russia could be brought into Europe (both through the Eastern Locarno and by joining the League). Simon was somewhat economical with the truth, saying that Britain favoured Soviet Russia’s joining the League.<sup>81</sup> The problem for the British with the Eastern Pact was twofold: a lack of reciprocity (in that, while France was guaranteed by Soviet Russia and vice versa, Germany was not) and a belief that Germany would not accept it unless there were ‘some adjustments’ with respect to armaments. Barthou stated that the proposed pact would contain a Soviet

<sup>76</sup> Clerk to FO, tel 175, 21 Jun 1934, FO 371/17747/C3936/247/18; Chilston to FO, disp 228, 16 May 1934, FO 371/18304/N3120/16/38; Chilston to FO, disp 258, 258, 31 May 1934, FO 371/18304/N3408/16/38; Chilston to Collier, 22 Jun 1934, FO 371/18305/N4027/16/38.

<sup>77</sup> Collier’s minute (26 Jun) on Chilston to FO, tel 81, FO 371/18298/N3682/2/38.

<sup>78</sup> Vansittart’s minute (26 Jun) on Chilston to FO, tel 81, 22 Jun 1934, FO 371/17747/C4011/247/18.

<sup>79</sup> Record of conversation, 3 Jul 1934, FO 371/18305/N4029/16/38; Vansittart’s minute (13 Jul) and letter to Chilston (23 Jul), both FO 371/18305/N4027/16/38.

<sup>80</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on ‘Notes of an Anglo-French Meeting, held in the Room of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at the Foreign Office, on July 9, 1934 at 10.30 a.m.’; same title, meeting held at 3.30 p.m.; same title, meeting held 10 Jul 1934: all Sargent Papers, FO 800/273.

<sup>81</sup> Simon shared Chamberlain’s view; see N. Chamberlain to Simon, 9 Aug 1934, Simon Papers, FO 800/289.

guarantee of Germany (although not a French guarantee of Germany), but was uncompromising in his rejection of giving Germany concessions about armaments. This was to put the cart before the horse. He preferred creating security by means of the Eastern Pact, and then seeing whether this affected Germany's policy about rearmament. When pressed by Simon about reciprocity, Barthou noted that the French guarantee of Soviet Russia resulted from a Soviet request; if 'Germany wanted to participate in the proposed arrangements and asked for a French guarantee against Russia, France would give it'. This had promise, but the British insisted on two points: that any new arrangement would not extend Britain's own commitments and that negotiations for an Eastern Locarno would proceed hand in hand with similar discussions of Germany's desire for equality of rights with respect to armaments. After negotiations, a formula was worked out, and the British promised that they would promote the Eastern Locarno. While Simon put the issue to the Germans, there was no response until 8 September and it consisted merely of 'observations'.<sup>82</sup> Germany was not to be rushed.

However, the Anglo-French accord and the earlier chastisements of the Soviets had their effect. Over the course of the summer, as negotiations for Soviet entry into the League proceeded, the tone of the Soviet press towards Britain improved markedly.<sup>83</sup> But the entry of Soviet Russia into the League on 18 September did not mean that the British believed that Soviet foreign policy was now imbued with the tenets of liberal internationalism.<sup>84</sup> J. M. K. Vyvyan contended that the Soviet entry into the League 'does not imply any change in their aims. They have all along made that purpose of their action perfectly clear – the desire to avoid war . . . joining the League is merely a cynical development of the foreign policy of the five-year plan, which has been authoritatively expressed by Soviet publicists as dictated by the necessity of a "breathing space".' Collier was guardedly optimistic and hopeful. He

<sup>82</sup> Simon to Phipps, disp 787, 19 Jul 1934, and Simon to Phipps, disp 1018, 11 Sept 1934, both Sargent Papers, FO 800/273.

<sup>83</sup> Simon's minute (3 Jul) on Vansittart's conversation with French ambassador, 27 Jun 1934, FO 371/17747/C4098/247/18; Vansittart's minute (19 Jun) on UK delegation (Geneva) to FO, disp 89, 14 Jun 1934, FO 371/18298/N3531/2/38. For Soviet attempts to bargain, see the untitled memo by Vyvyan, 7 Jul 1934, FO 371/18298/N4148/2/38; conversation with Cahan (counsellor, Soviet embassy), 3 Aug 1934, FO 371/18298/N4599/2/38; Chilston to FO, disp 368, 27 Jul 1934, FO 371/18305/N4622/16/38; conversations, 7 Aug and 11 Aug 1934, FO 371/18299/N4662/2/38; Vansittart's minute (8 Aug) on Strang's memo, 8 Aug 1934, FO 371/18299/N4676/2/38; conversation with Maisky, 9 Aug 1934, FO 371/18299/N4718/2/38; Chilston to FO, disp 396, 11 Aug 1934, FO 371/18305/N4840/16/38.

<sup>84</sup> Gilbert Murray (LNU) to Simon, 21 Sept 1934, Avon Papers, AP 14/1/343A.

also hoped that Litvinov's experiences at Geneva would make him 'realise that Soviet foreign policy still has many difficulties to overcome and must be conducted with caution and moderation'.<sup>85</sup> Simon was not so sure that the Soviets would proceed as Collier desired, 'for Litvinov is a mischievous monkey and will not be easily persuaded to unanimity' in the council.<sup>86</sup>

Vyvyan's doubts and concerns seemed more convincing in the light of the deterioration in Soviet–Japanese relations. The issue of the CER continued to divide the two during the summer and early autumn of 1934.<sup>87</sup> The Foreign Office initially remained sceptical that the two countries would come to blows, but it was clear that substantial mutual animosity existed. This was made manifest by events. There was much debate and speculation in London.<sup>88</sup> Orde was surprised at the rumour that 'the higher military authorities' in Japan wanted war with Soviet Russia. He felt that, since 'we cannot want to see a war break out', at some point the British would have to warn the Japanese 'of the risk they will run of alienating British & other foreign opinion'. For the sake of appearing even-handed, Orde added that Soviet Russia should also be warned. The opinion of the War Office was sought.<sup>89</sup> Their view was that only one faction of the Japanese army favoured war with Soviet Russia. That being so, the War Office suggested that no advice be given to Japan, since Tokyo's response to its being proffered would be 'very unfavourable'. Besides, if and when Japan decided to go to war with Soviet Russia, the War Office believed that 'foreign public opinion' would have little influence.

The matter did not die there. Vansittart précised the above for Simon, pointing out that 'it is in fact a most important British interest that peace should be preserved in the Far East, and that if hostilities unfortunately broke out there should be neither victor nor vanquished'. And, since the

<sup>85</sup> Vyvyan's minute (3 Oct) on Charles (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, disp 476, 25 Sept 1934, FO 371/18301/N5586/2/38, Collier's minute (3 Oct). See also Collier's minute (21 Sept) on Patteson to FO, tel 59 saving, 19 Sept 1934, FO 371/18300/N5455/2/38.

<sup>86</sup> Simon to MacDonald, 3 Oct 1934, Simon Papers, FO 800/289.

<sup>87</sup> Clive (ambassador, Tokyo) to FO, disp 345, 20 Jun 1934, FO 371/18176/F4456/316/23; Chilston to FO, disp 361, 24 Jun 1934, FO 371/18301/N4648/4/38; Clive to FO, tel 211, 31 Aug 1934, FO 371/18176/F5313/316/23; Chilston to FO, disp 449, 11 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5507/316/23.

<sup>88</sup> Except where indicated, this and the following paragraph are based on Clive to FO, tel 213, 4 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5371/316/23, and the minutes, particularly those of Orde (3 Sept), Harcourt-Smith (5 Sept), and Vansittart (5 Sept).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, and Ismay (WO) to Harcourt-Smith (FED), 7 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5630/216/23; Clive to FO, disp 443, 16 Aug 1934, FO 371/18177/F5593/216/23.

Cabinet had 'recently laid down and reiterated . . . that on account of our exposed position in the Far East every possible step should be taken to ensure good relations with Japan', on 5 September the PUS suggested that Simon put the entire matter to his colleagues.

This suggestion was linked to another aspect of British strategic foreign policy, the forthcoming London naval conference. In June, the Soviets had asserted that there was a 'firm Anglo-Japanese bloc' in all naval disarmament discussions.<sup>90</sup> Because of this political dimension, Soviet Russia wished to be included in the naval talks. Vansittart used an interview with Maisky on 3 July to attempt to disabuse the ambassador of the idea of any Anglo-Japanese arrangement. As the PUS minuted on 20 July, 'no sane person dreams of renewing the Anglo-Japanese alliance'.<sup>91</sup> However, that was written before a Japanese *ballon d'essai* suggesting an Anglo-Japanese non-aggression pact arrived in London.<sup>92</sup> On 20 August, Simon seized on the Japanese overture, no doubt seeing in it a means to deal with both Chamberlain's continued insistence on an arrangement with Japan and the related issues to be considered at the naval talks. The foreign secretary asked Vansittart to have the Foreign Office consider two issues: first, a proposal to Japan that it make a '*voluntary declaration*' as to what naval limits would be acceptable to it; second, the Japanese suggestion of a non-aggression pact.

The first issue was dealt with quickly. While Craigie believed that this was the best way forward in theory, no one was optimistic that Japan would be willing. The non-aggression pact raised wider issues, particularly as Chamberlain had written Vansittart a 'letter of *very* strong advocacy' in favour. The clearest opposition came from Orde. The head of the Far Eastern Department pointed out that the issue was a complicated one. To treat bilaterally with Japan would 'shock' the United States and make Britain 'seem to be ostentatiously divorcing ourselves from America and following in the Japanese wake'. Further, since Japan's actions in China continued to be immoderate, any support for Tokyo would offend the Chinese and create 'horror' at the League of Nations. The effect on Soviet Russia would be profound and this spoke to the fears of a Russo-Japanese war. Moscow 'would, no doubt, take the pact amiss, and if, as might conceivably happen, the result of a pact were

<sup>90</sup> Chilton to FO, disp 286, 16 Jun 1934, FO 371/17598/A5055/1938/45, minutes, Craigie (3 Jul) and Vansittart (4 Jul).

<sup>91</sup> Vansittart's minute (20 Jul) on conversation between Eden and Hugh Wilson, 19 Jul 1934, FO 371/17599/A6404/1938/45.

<sup>92</sup> Reported Clive (ambassador, Tokyo) to FO, disp 369, 5 Jul 1934, FO 371/17599/A7695/1938/45, and minutes (17 Aug to 2 Sept), esp. Vansittart (22, 25 and 29 Aug), Craigie (23 Sept), Orde (28 Aug) and Eden (2 Sept).

to encourage Japan to fight Russia, we should see the Russian counterpoise to Germany seriously weakened'. For these same reasons, Orde also dismissed any idea of tripartite pact in the region.

This was enough for Vansittart, but Eden was not deterred. The Lord Privy Seal argued that, if an agreement that satisfied China could be reached, an Anglo-Japanese pact might be acceptable. He was dismissive about the impact of such a move on Soviet Russia. 'I certainly would not give it [such a pact] up', Eden concluded in a remark that was prophetic of his later position, 'for a contingent fear of the loss of Russia as a makeweight to Germany in Europe. I do not believe that Russia is a weight, only a mass, in Europe.' Despite this, on 29 August, Vansittart advised Simon that the idea of a voluntary declaration by Japan be referred to the Admiralty, but opposed the idea of any pact with Japan. A few days later, on 5 September, Vansittart suggested to Simon that the foreign secretary should bring the matter to the Cabinet.

Simon agreed. He noted that to offer advice to Japan at the present moment would be 'either ineffective or redundant'. Chamberlain accepted Simon's argument, although the acting prime minister emphasized that the Japanese might in future be more likely to listen to British advice 'if they had special reasons for desiring to maintain the friendliest relations with us'.<sup>93</sup> The tension went out of Russo-Japanese relations in late September due to Soviet Russia's entry into the League and an interim agreement between the two over the CER.<sup>94</sup> From a 'cynical point of view', it was noted at the Foreign Office, this change in Russo-Japanese relations did not 'particularly suit our book', but the improvement was believed merely temporary.<sup>95</sup> Even by late October, when a Russo-Japanese *détente* seemed likely, Harcourt-Smith dismissed the idea that 'the pendulum of Russo-Japanese relations' could 'remain suspended there for long'.<sup>96</sup> The War Office was even more cynical, arguing that Tokyo's entire initiative towards Britain resulted only from the Japanese uneasiness about Soviet Russia's joining the League and recognition by the United States.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Simon's minute (7 Sept) on Clive to FO, tel 213, 4 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5371/316/23; Chamberlain to Simon, 10 Sept 1934, Simon Papers, FO 800/291.

<sup>94</sup> Clive to FO, tel 216, 19 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5636/316/23; Clive to FO, disp 491, 13 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5979/316/23.

<sup>95</sup> Minute (30 Oct 1934) by R. H. S. Allen (FED) on Clive to FO, disp 519, 19 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F6388/316/23.

<sup>96</sup> His minute (30 Oct) on Clive to FO, disp 519, 28 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F6388/316/23 and widely supported, minutes by Pratt (1 Nov), Orde (5 Nov) and Wellesley (5 Nov).

<sup>97</sup> MI2 to DMO&I, 27 Sept 1934 and the latter's minute (1 Oct), WO 106/5501. The Adm believed Japanese policy was aimed at Britain; see Dickens (DNI) to Dill (DMO&I, WO), 28 Sept 1934, and reply (26 Oct), WO 106/5502.

None the less, the improvement provided Neville Chamberlain with another opportunity to lobby for an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*.<sup>98</sup> The chancellor lunched with Simon on 17 September and again on the 24th to argue his case. As a result, on 25 September, Simon broached the matter at the Cabinet, where Chamberlain suggested that he and the foreign secretary would prepare a joint paper on the subject.<sup>99</sup> In the interim, Clive was instructed to make enquiries in Tokyo. The Treasury and Foreign Office's memorandum argued Chamberlain's favourite point, that an Anglo-Japanese agreement in the Far East would reduce Britain's possible enemies, but it was hedged about by the difficulties the Foreign Office had often mentioned concerning British relations with China, the United States and Soviet Russia.<sup>100</sup> In fact, Simon had told MacDonald, even before the joint memorandum was presented to Cabinet, that 'the reaction both in America and in Soviet Russia would be pronounced' should Britain appear to cosy up to Japan.<sup>101</sup> The initiative collapsed by late autumn, despite an initial warm response from Tokyo. This resulted from two things. The first was a determined campaign opposing it launched by Sir George Sansom, the influential commercial counsellor at the British Embassy in Tokyo. He argued that the Japanese had no intention of sharing their position in the Far East with Britain and that keeping British policy towards Japan fluid was the only way to influence Tokyo.<sup>102</sup> The second was the fact that the entire issue became subsumed within the naval talks, at which the Japanese indicated that there could be no limitations placed on their naval building. The result was that the Cabinet decided to leave the matter of future relations with Japan until after the naval conference.<sup>103</sup>

With this Anglo-Japanese impediment avoided, the way was clear for other possibilities. On 6 November, one emerged: a Soviet initiative for improved Anglo-Soviet relations. This was doubly important, since

<sup>98</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on David Dutton, *Simon. A Political Biography of Sir John Simon* (London, 1992), 190–3; see N. Chamberlain's retrospective diary entry, 9 Oct 1934, Chamberlain Papers, NC 2/23A.

<sup>99</sup> Minutes, Cab 32(34), 25 Sept 1934, Cab 23/79.

<sup>100</sup> 'Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs', CP 223(34), 16 Oct 1934, Cab 24/250.

<sup>101</sup> Simon to MacDonald, 3 Oct 1934, Simon Papers, FO 800/291.

<sup>102</sup> Clive to Wellesley, 12 Oct 1934, FO 371/18115/F6533/164/10; Sansom to Sir E. Crowe (comptroller-general, DOT), private, 12 Oct 1934, FO 371/18184/F6544/591/23. For Sansom, see Gordon Daniels, 'Sir George Sansom (1883–1965): Historian and Diplomat', in Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Gordon Daniels, eds., *Britain and Japan 1859–1991. Themes and Personalities* (London and New York, 1991), 277–88.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes, Cab 36(34), 24 Oct 1934, Cab 23/79; Craigie's minute, 'Non-Aggression Pact With Japan', secret, 29 Oct 1934, FO 371/17602/A9844/1938/45.



during the summer fears had been raised that, if the Eastern Locarno were to fail, then a Soviet–German *rapprochement* might occur.<sup>104</sup> Hence, any Soviet suggestions needed to be listened to with care. Maisky made the Soviet opening by means of a conversation with one of Eden's friends.<sup>105</sup> The Soviet ambassador stressed that British and Soviet interests were no longer opposed. The Foreign Office was convinced that this initiative stemmed from 'alarming rumours, from Tokyo, of possibilities of an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*', an assumption given more weight later in the month when Litvinov enquired whether an Anglo-Japanese agreement had been signed as part of the naval discussions.<sup>106</sup> The British were quick to see an opportunity to resolve their minor outstanding issues with Soviet Russia. J. L. Dodds assessed clearly both what had caused this initiative and the possible advantages: 'It is becoming increasingly evident', he noted, 'that the Russian fears of Japan and Germany can be worked to our advantage.' Wellesley was cautious – 'unfortunately Russia has always proved herself to be a very unreliable partner' – and suggested a watching brief. Collier shared Maisky's position. But, the head of the Northern Department feared that the Soviets might assume that Britain needed Soviet aid to counter Japan more than Soviet Russia needed British support. Thus, the Soviets might be unlikely to make any concessions to the British. Collier also noted that the Soviets might place a political construction (and hence fear some sort of Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*) on a recent British initiative – the mission to the Far East headed by Lord Barnaby of the Federation of British Industries (FBI).<sup>107</sup>

Maisky's initiative was not an isolated event. On 9 November, the Soviet ambassador spoke to Simon.<sup>108</sup> While there were rumours

<sup>104</sup> R. H. Campbell (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, *chargé d'affaires*, Paris) to Vansittart, 26 Jul 1934, FO 371/17749/C5219/247/18, Vansittart's minute (28 Jul); Clerk (ambassador, Paris) to FO, tel 220, 2 Aug 1934, FO 371/17749/C5284/247/18, Wigram's minute (3 Aug); minute, Vansittart (4 Aug) on Chilston to FO, tel 107, 3 Aug 1934, FO 371/17749/C5214/247/18; Sargent's minute (15 Sept) on an untitled German memo, 8 Sept 1934, FO 371/17750/C6076/247/18; Chilston to FO, tel 160, 28 Nov 1934, FO 371/17751/C8033/247/18; Patteson to FO, tel 72, 21 Nov 1934, FO 371/17761/C7863/842/18.

<sup>105</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Boothby to Eden, 6 Nov 1934, FO 371/18305/N6328/16/38, minutes by Speaight (12 Nov), Dodd (13 Nov), Collier (13 Nov) and Wellesley (14 Nov).

<sup>106</sup> Patteson (Geneva) to FO, tel 70, 21 Nov 1934, FO 371/17601/A9305/1938/45.

<sup>107</sup> Collier disliked the FBI mission: his minutes, 21 Sept on Chilston to FO, disp 449, 11 Sept 1934, FO 371/18177/F5507/316/23; 13 Nov on Boothby to Eden, 6 Nov 1934, FO 371/18305/N6328/16/38; 28 Dec on Vansittart's conversation with Maisky, 19 Dec 1934, FO 371/18306/N7104/16/38.

<sup>108</sup> Simon to Charles, disp 544, 9 Nov 1934, FO 371/18305/N6462/16/38.



that Litvinov's position was becoming less secure due to his policies having antagonized Germany, the flow of Soviet policy still seemed to run towards Britain.<sup>109</sup> This was underscored when Maisky spoke to Vansittart on 13 December. Maisky reiterated what he had told Simon, and then raised his concerns about the course of Anglo-Soviet relations. The PUS quickly countered Maisky's fears. When the latter spoke of those of the 'extreme Right' in Britain who favoured a Russo-Japanese conflict, Vansittart 'disabused his mind emphatically of any such suggestion'. Vansittart also emphasized the British desire for peace, downplayed any political implications of the FBI mission and assured Maisky that Simon had not forgotten the earlier interview.<sup>110</sup> Three days later, Maisky again spoke with Vansittart.<sup>111</sup> The ambassador returned to the FBI mission and rumours of a possible British loan to Japan, wondered about the anti-Soviet ventilations of several MPs, expressed concern about the anti-Soviet nature of both British newspapers and films and, finally, suggested that an official British visit to Soviet Russia would be 'welcomed' as a harbinger of improved relations. For Vansittart, the interview was a 'further and striking' indication of the new Soviet desire to improve Anglo-Soviet relations, a desire kindled by a fear of 'Japan and Germany'.

There were many interpretations of this interview. Collier sympathized with some of Maisky's concerns about the direction of British policy. The former pointed out the informal connections between the FBI mission and the British government (including the Foreign Office's Department of Overseas Trade – DOT). In a backhanded slap at Fisher and Chamberlain, Collier noted that 'the pro-Japanese policy advocated by members of the mission and their friends is supported in high official circles in London, particularly in the Treasury'. On the other hand, Collier was dismissive of some of Maisky's points: if the Soviets did not like the tone of British press 'comment on mass terrorism, they have only to abandon such methods'. Finally, Collier advocated a strong statement that Britain was 'opposed to any Power seeking exclusive political or commercial predominance in any specific part of the world outside its own territories'. This was part and parcel of his objection to

<sup>109</sup> Charles to FO, disp 568, 19 Nov 1934, FO 371/18297/N6525/1/38; Charles to Collier, 20 Nov 1934, FO 371/18318/N6534/120/38; Charles to Collier, 4 Dec 1934, FO 371/18318/N6819/120/38.

<sup>110</sup> Vansittart's record of a conversation, 13 Dec 1934, FO 371/18306/N6953/16/38, minutes and marginalia.

<sup>111</sup> The remainder of this paragraph and the following one are based on Vansittart's memo, 19 December 1934, FO 371/18306/N7104/16/38, minutes, Collier (28 Dec), Orde (29 Dec), and Mounsey (31 Dec).

the Anglo-Japanese flirtation, a policy that he termed “doing a deal” with Japan at the expense of China and other countries in Asia (including Soviet Russia) and “sharing the swag”. Orde was less fierce. He refused to criticize the DOT, but agreed that a statement decrying any Russo-Japanese conflict would be of value. Mounsey ruminated on the suspicious nature of the Soviets, but favoured both a visit and, if it could be done carefully, a statement outlining the British desire for peace in the Far East. This advice was accepted by Vansittart.

Vansittart met with Maisky again on 27 December.<sup>112</sup> The meeting was a mixture of conciliation and plain speaking. The PUS told the Soviet ambassador that the MPs’ fulminations did not reflect policy. Further, Vansittart stated that he had ‘unimpeachable’ knowledge of the Comintern’s interference in British ‘domestic affairs’. If Soviet Russia wished for better relations – if it had ‘more important fish to fry’ – then such interference should cease. He promised to look into the rumours of a British loan to Japan, but observed that censorship of films was a difficult matter.<sup>113</sup> For his part, Maisky raised a matter that touched tangentially on Anglo-Soviet relations, noting that the German foreign minister, Constantin von Neurath, had made ‘ominous’ remarks – apropos the Eastern Pact – about refusing to accept the sanctity of borders in eastern Europe. Maisky added that Soviet Russia refused to contemplate anything that would serve to ‘have the effect of undermining the authority of the League of Nations’.

Maisky’s remarks reflected Franco-Soviet relations. In late November, Litvinov and the new French foreign minister, Pierre Laval, had agreed that neither would discuss any matters with Germany pending the outcome of the stalled Eastern Locarno talks.<sup>114</sup> This agreement infuriated Hitler, who vented his displeasure to the British ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, in a long ‘tantrum’, claiming that the agreement was a cover for a secret military pact.<sup>115</sup> At the meeting, Hitler ‘eyed’ Phipps ‘hungrily like a tiger’. ‘I derived the distinct impression’, the ambassador

<sup>112</sup> This paragraph, except where otherwise indicated, is based on Vansittart’s record of a conversation, 27 Dec 1934, FO 371/18306/N7155/16/38.

<sup>113</sup> A point that Maisky had raised earlier; see the minutes on Vansittart’s conversation with Maisky on 19 Dec FO 371/18306/N7187/16/38; for historical parallels, see Keith Neilson, “Incidents” and Foreign Policy: A Case Study’, *D&S*, 9, 1 (1998), 79–80.

<sup>114</sup> Patteson to FO, tel 72, 21 Nov 1934, FO 371/17653/C8004/85/17; Clerk to FO, tel 126, 24 Nov 1934, FO 371/17653/C7950/85/17 and minutes; Campbell (Paris) to FO, tel 128, 26 Nov 1934, FO 371/17653/C7969/85/17; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933–1939* (London, 1984), 43–5.

<sup>115</sup> Sargent’s minute (28 Nov) on Phipps to FO, tel 302, 27 Nov 1934, FO 371/17696/C8010/20/18.

noted, 'that had my nationality and status been different I should have formed part of his evening meal'.<sup>116</sup> The British suspected that neither the French nor the Soviets were bargaining in good faith. The French were thought to be pushing the idea of an Eastern Locarno only as a 'cloak' to provide 'a very close Franco-Russian understanding, if not an alliance, with a proper semblance of respectability'.<sup>117</sup> The Soviets, on the other hand, were thought to be using the rumour of Soviet-German talks to bind the French more closely.<sup>118</sup> In both cases, it was clear that both Paris and Moscow were looking outside the League to ensure their own security against a revisionist Germany.

At the end of 1934, British strategic foreign policy faced very different circumstances than it had two years earlier. Arms control had largely failed, and the League had proven itself incapable of checking Japan in China. But there was no new consensus about how Britain should guarantee its own interests. Partly, this was due to divided counsel. While the DRC had pointed one way, Neville Chamberlain had succeeded in reducing the amounts spent and diverted money away from the navy towards the Royal Air Force. Coupled with this, he had also partly succeeded in subverting the DRC's priorities through his advocacy of an arrangement with Japan. There was, however, an important new factor. Soviet Russia had made it clear that it was abandoning its policy of isolation and aloofness and was willing to join with other Powers, including Britain, to check Japan and Germany. Further, the Soviets had increased their military strength in order to give their policy teeth.

The British treated this new orientation with caution. Some of this was due to a suspicion that the Soviet about-face was a cynical ploy and a belief that a Soviet Union in the League of Nations would cause as many difficulties as it solved. Others, particularly Collier, argued that Britain and Soviet Russia, however much they might dislike each other, would be drawn together by force of circumstances. But there was a legacy of distrust to be overcome; continued Soviet propaganda in the British Empire, the actions of the Comintern generally and such matters as the Metro-Vickers incident all combined to make any improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations difficult. Further, any arrangement with Soviet

<sup>116</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 254, 28 Nov 1934, FO 371/17696/C8045/20/18.

<sup>117</sup> Wigram's minute (4 Dec) on R. H. Campbell to FO, tel 328, 3 Dec 1934, FO 371/17751/C8184/247/18.

<sup>118</sup> Simon's conversation with Corbin (French ambassador), 4 Dec 1934, FO 371/17751/C8299/247/18, minutes; Chilston to FO, disp 599, 4 Dec 1934, FO 371/17751/C8325/247/18, minutes.

Russia would limit Britain's diplomatic options, particularly in the Far East. However, the deteriorating situation in Europe had seen other Powers begin to pursue new policies to ensure their security – the Eastern Locarno talks were evidence of this – and Britain found itself involved. Soviet Russia seemed to offer new possibilities for British strategic foreign policy. The following years would see whether the British were interested in pursuing them.

### 3 A clash of sensibilities: January to June 1935

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At the beginning of 1935, British strategic foreign policy was changing. While the British had not yet abandoned either arms limitation or the League, the events of the next six months demonstrated that these were uncertain instruments. This was especially so because Japan and Germany were now absent from Geneva. Thus, the British were forced to experiment with other ways of protecting their interests in the uncertain 'period of deterrence'.

Here, Soviet Russia played an important, if awkward role. This was due to a clash of sensibilities. Soviet Russia sought security by means of alliances. If necessary, these alliances could be covered by the cloak of collective security, but Moscow's real goal was the promise of military support, something evident in the Eastern Locarno talks. This ran counter to the British desire to manage and control Germany's rearmament, since Berlin not only was unwilling to enter the Eastern Locarno agreements, but also was using them to fend off calls for arms limitation. Any Franco-Soviet agreement was potentially both antithetical to working through the League and dangerous to Britain if its Locarno commitments were increased. However, while castigating the Soviets for a return to pre-1914 methods, the British themselves also stepped outside the realm of collective action, signing the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in 1935. With Germany squared, the British still had to deal with Japan, a task made difficult because the collapse of naval arms limitation talks in December 1934 had resulted from Tokyo's intransigence over naval issues. Dealing with Japan also reintroduced the Soviet factor.

At the beginning of 1935, Anglo-Soviet relations were at a potential turning point. A Soviet desire for better relations was manifest. From both Tokyo and Moscow, there were reports that Soviet representatives had been ordered to 'cultivate good relations with Gt. Britain'.<sup>1</sup> This was

<sup>1</sup> Speaight's minute (8 Jan 1935) on Clive to FO, disp 605, 23 Nov 1934, FO 371/18177/F7563/316/23; Chilston to FO, tel 170, 22 Dec 1934, FO 371/18306/N7103/16/38;

good news, since Hitler's Germany was increasingly dangerous in Europe and Japan's relative power in the Far East vis-à-vis Britain was cresting.<sup>2</sup> But Anglo-Soviet relations were intertwined with more important issues: the Anglo-French discussions about how to react to German rearmament and the attempt to bring Berlin back to the League.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Simon had gone to Paris in late December to discuss this matter, and had invited the French to London for further talks in the new year.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in January and February 1935, the Foreign Office maintained only a watching brief on Soviet affairs. This entailed focusing on the continued growth of the Soviet military forces.<sup>5</sup> There was little doubt that Soviet military growth was aimed at combating the challenge of Japan and Germany. And there was a concern that Soviet Russia might, if its efforts to improve relations with Britain and France bore no fruit, turn to a policy of *rapprochement* with either Tokyo or Berlin. 'The moral for us', Collier observed, 'seems to be that we should handle M. Litvinov very carefully in the next few months.'<sup>6</sup> This reflected also the Soviet reaction to other occurrences in Europe. Franco-Italian discussions at Rome on 4–8 January 1935 had yielded the so-called Danubian Pact. Litvinov had immediately gone to Geneva to remind the French of the protocol forbidding Moscow and Paris entering talks that might affect the stalled Eastern Locarno (often termed the Eastern Pact) negotiations. At the Foreign Office, there was near-unanimity that Litvinov was 'jealous'. But Collier noted that 'the important thing is to keep the Soviet Govt. faithful to their present policy of supporting the *status quo*', although no one could suggest anything that might keep Litvinov and his policy in the ascendant.<sup>7</sup> Not wishing to become involved, the Foreign Office decided merely to inform Eden at Geneva about Litvinov's likely line.

Simon to Chilston, disp 612, 27 Dec 1934, FO 371/18306/N7104/16/38. For an interpretation of Anglo-Soviet relations contrary to what follows, see Michael Jabara Carley, "'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances': The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934–1936', *CEH*, 5, 1 (1996), 42–52.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes, 266th and 269th meetings CID, 22 Nov 1934 and 16 Apr 1935, both Cab 2/6; minutes, 132nd and 133rd meetings COS, 24 July 1934 and 9 Oct 1934, both Cab 53/5; Phipps to FO disp 13, 7 Jan 1935, FO 371/1882/C235/55/18.

<sup>3</sup> A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931–1938* (New York, 1986), 79–87.

<sup>4</sup> Simon (Monte Carlo) to Phipps, tel 5, 3 Jan 1935, FO 371/19496/R96/1/67.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922–1939', *CJH*, 28, 2 (1993), 208–9; further in Chilston to FO, disp 82, 11 Feb 1935, FO 371/19454/N753/49/38.

<sup>6</sup> Collier's minute (31 Jan) and Vansittart's minute (8 Feb) on Clive to FO, tel 32, 29 Jan 1935, FO 371/19247/F632/13/23.

<sup>7</sup> Chilston to FO, joint tels 5 and 6, 10 Jan 1935, FO 371/19496/R289/1/67, the minutes, R. A. Gallop (Southern Department), 11 Jan; C. W. Baxter (CD, 12 Jan); Collier (12 Jan); Owen O'Malley (head, Southern Department), Sargent and Vansittart (all 16

More information soon arrived. From Rome, the British ambassador contended that the main objection to the Danubian Pact came from Germany, but that the Soviets feared that, if Berlin adhered to the pact, then Germany would reject the Eastern Locarno. The Southern Department again put this down to Soviet 'jealousy', but Collier was less certain, arguing that Litvinov was 'genuinely afraid' of a German 'turn to the East'.<sup>8</sup> On 19 January, Litvinov told Eden in Geneva that Germany must be made to sign the Eastern Locarno and rejoin the League. Then, and only then, would Moscow 'be willing to help in negotiation of an arms convention'. The head of the Southern Department, Owen O'Malley, maintained that this pique should be ignored. For him, neither the Eastern Locarno nor the Danubian Pact should be allowed to stand in the way of Britain's 'greatest determination to reach an agreement with Germany about limitations & return to the League'. Collier did not agree. He contended that to follow O'Malley's advice, 'would [be to] sacrifice our friends in the vain hope of placating our enemies'. Sargent and Vansittart concurred, and it was agreed to warn the French not to make an acceptance of the Eastern Locarno a required precursor – as Litvinov wished – to any discussions about German rearmament.<sup>9</sup>

These discussions in Geneva had also been affected by the result of the Saar plebiscite, which returned that region to Germany.<sup>10</sup> Chilston reported both the 'considerable misgiving' caused in Soviet circles by the plebiscite and a concomitant belief that this was the beginning of German expansion.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Eastern Pact took on an even greater significance for Moscow, leading to Litvinov's insisting that any discussions of arms control with Germany must be tied to its signing.<sup>12</sup> On 19 January, Sir Eric Phipps, the British ambassador at Berlin, pointed out that Hitler was unlikely either to return to the League or to agree to the

Jan); Chilston to FO, disp 14, 11 Jan 1935, FO 371/19497/R377/1/67. On the events, see G. Bruce Strang, 'Imperial Dreams: The Mussolini-Laval Accords of January 1935', *HJ*, 44, 3 (2001), 799–809; A. J. Crozier, 'Philippe Berthelot and the Rome Agreements of January 1935', *HJ*, 26, 2 (1983), 413–22; Charles O. Richardson, 'The Rome Accords of January 1935 and the Coming of the Italian–Ethiopian War', *Historian*, 41 (1978), 41–58.

<sup>8</sup> Drummond to Sargent, 12 Jan 1935, FO 371/19497/R442/1/67, minutes by Collier (31 Jan) and E. H. Carr (Southern Department), 21 Jan.

<sup>9</sup> Pateson to FO, tel 31, 19 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C505/55/18, minutes, Baxter (21 Jan), O'Malley (21 Jan), Collier (21 Jan), Sargent (22 Jan) and Vansittart (22 Jan).

<sup>10</sup> Vansittart's bitter minute (18 Jan) on Phipps to FO, tel 21, 17 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C435/55/18, the minutes on Phipps to FO, tel 17, 17 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C473/55/18; C. J. Hill, 'Great Britain and the Saar Plebiscite of 13 January 1935', *JCH*, 9, 2 (1974), 121–42.

<sup>11</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 8, 18 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C474/55/18.

<sup>12</sup> Drummond to FO, disp 63, 19 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C582/55/18, minute, Dew (CD), 24 Jan; Phipps to FO, disp 112, 2 Feb 1935, FO 371/19459/N614/76/38.

Eastern Locarno.<sup>13</sup> Phipps also held that the results of the plebiscite would make Hitler more difficult to deal with in future, leading Eden to despair: 'A most important despatch, & a gloomy one', the Lord Privy Seal observed, 'Germany is now well on the way to rearmament, she is no longer afraid of a "preventative war" against her & in a few years – four I am told is the popular figure in Berlin – she will be strong enough to ask, in a tone that will not brook refusal, for her desiderata.'<sup>14</sup>

British considerations of Soviet Russia were not confined to Europe. The Soviets argued that the Japanese denunciation of the Washington naval treaty in December 1934 presaged a Japanese attempt to dominate the Far East, probably with British connivance.<sup>15</sup> There were divided opinions at the Foreign Office about how to allay this suspicion. Craigie, still trying to keep the naval talks alive, dismissed any idea that Britain should shape its policy with a Soviet concern in mind. Collier disagreed. He viewed Far Eastern policy in a wider context. A 'policy of cooperation with Japan in China cannot be regarded only from the Far Eastern point of view. The Soviet Government are intensely nervous about Japan.' The Soviets, Collier felt, 'consider at present that they have in the world only two enemies of real political importance, Japan and Germany'. Should Britain be considered to be collaborating with Japan, this would give support to those in Moscow (a group centred around Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, the commissar for war) who opposed Litvinov's policy of co-operation with Britain and France and, instead, favoured a '*détente* in Soviet-German relations'. The improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations over the past year would be lost should Voroshilov's faction win out. 'The coming together of Russia and Germany', Collier opined, 'is Europe's greatest danger.' For this reason, the head of the Northern Department concluded, the 'situation in Europe must once again dictate our policy in the Far East. It should forbid us from gratuitously antagonising Japan; but it also forbids us from approaching Japan beyond the limit where such an approach would alarm Russia and throw her into the arms of Germany.'

Vansittart agreed with Collier, and sent the latter's views to Warren Fisher, as the PUS suspected that the Treasury wished to proceed with a

<sup>13</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 24, 19 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C507/55/18; 'Disarmament: Material for impending discussions with French Ministers', CP 19(35), FO, 24 Jan 1935, Cab 24/253.

<sup>14</sup> Phipps to FO, disp 60, 22 Jan 1935, FO 371/18823/C623/55/18, minute, Eden, 31 Jan.

<sup>15</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is based on Chilston to FO, disp 641, 31 Dec 1934, FO 371/18731/A127/22/45, minutes by Craigie (9 Jan), Collier (9 Jan – covering an attached joint untitled memo with F. Ashton-Gwatkin of 7 Jan), Wellesley (10 Jan) and Vansittart (11 Jan).



scheme to act with Japan to stabilize China's currency.<sup>16</sup> Vansittart informed Fisher 'that we are irrevocably opposed to any deal *à deux* with Japan'. This was wise, for the Treasury, in concert with the Board of Trade, was about to return to the charge on the issue of Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*, believing that Japan was willing to share predominance in the Far East with Britain.<sup>17</sup> To correct this erroneous view, the Foreign Office put forward arguments pointing out that Japan's goals in China did not include Britain and noting that any Anglo-Japanese agreement would have repercussions for Britain's relations with the United States, China and Soviet Russia.<sup>18</sup>

The Cabinet discussed the matter on 16 January, 17 January and 13 February.<sup>19</sup> No decision was reached. Simon, in fact, tried to please all sides, arguing on 21 January that 'the true aim of our policy should be to remain on good terms not only with Japan but with China and the United States as well'.<sup>20</sup> This was utopian, and the matter was referred on 13 February to a Cabinet committee – the Political and Economic Relations with Japan Committee.<sup>21</sup> This arabesque to committee hid the Treasury's bile. Fisher was convinced that Anglo-Japanese relations must improve. He had taken advice from less-than-disinterested parties, dining with the Japanese ambassador, Matsudaira Tsuneo; Arthur Edwardes, the financial adviser to and London agent for the Manchukuo government; Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, the Japanese naval representative at the London talks; Sir Ernle Chatfield, the chief of Naval Staff and First Sea Lord; and Craigie. Fisher had found an ally in Craigie, who told the permanent secretary that he 'had a go at . . . the pundits of the Far Eastern Department' about their objections to improved Anglo-Japanese relations. But Fisher had his own vitriol with respect to Orde and Sansom. The latter was a disgruntled man working in Japan with a sense of grievance. The former was even more objectionable. 'Orde can', Fisher wrote, 'I think, best be described as a pedantic ass, admirably

<sup>16</sup> Original in FO 371/19238/F192/6/10, Vansittart's minute.

<sup>17</sup> Untitled memo, Fergusson (Treasury) for N. Chamberlain, 15 Jan 1935, T 172/1831; 'Anglo-Japanese Relations', CP 9(35), Runciman, secret, 4 Jan 1935, Cab 24/253.

<sup>18</sup> 'Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs', CP 8(35), secret, Simon, 11 Jan 1935, covering 'Memorandum by Mr. Sansom respecting Anglo-Japanese Relations', 29 Oct 1934; 'The Political Aspects of Trade Rivalry or Co-operation with Japan in China', Orde, 7 Jan 1935, all Cab 24/253. Clive preferred to steer a course midway between Japan and the United States; see Clive to Simon, Simon Papers, FO 800/291.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, Cab 4(35), Cab 5(35) and Cab 9(35), 16 Jan, 17 Jan and 13 Feb 1935, Cab 23/81.

<sup>20</sup> 'Anglo-Japanese Relations', Simon, 21 Jan 1935, Simon Papers, FO 800/290.

<sup>21</sup> G. Bennett, 'British Policy in the Far East 1933–1936: Treasury and Foreign Office', *MAS*, 26 (1992), 563–4; V. H. Rothwell, 'The Mission of Sir Frederick Leith-Ross to the Far East 1935–1936', *HJ*, 18 (1975), 149–50.

suit to join the eclectic brotherhood of Oxford or Cambridge. His pedantry is only equalled by his quite obvious ignorance of human nature, and at the same time he is obsessed with the fixed idea that original sin is monopolised by Japan, and our only proper attitude is, therefore, never to soil ourselves by contact with such impiety.<sup>22</sup> Neville Chamberlain had long held similar views. During January 1927, he had criticized the Far Eastern Department's policy on China, contending that they were 'always about a couple of months behind in dealing with the situation', adding that 'I had a poor opinion of that fat Sir Victor Wellesley.'<sup>23</sup> With Chamberlain, Fisher and Leith-Ross all broadly in agreement, there would be strong opposition at the Treasury to the Foreign Office's interpretation of the wider ramifications of Anglo-Japanese relations.

With the French arriving in London in early February for further talks about German rearmament, British policy about the Eastern Pact needed a resolution. Litvinov was adamantly opposed to any 'grouping of the Powers in which Russia is not a member', and felt that the results of the Saar plebiscite meant that the Eastern Pact must go forward 'at all costs'. Interpreting this inspired a mild controversy. The Central Department declared that Litvinov's influence was 'on the wane together with those of the Eastern Pact and of the Franco Russian alliance. Surely this is all to the good.' Collier disagreed with this conclusion, but agreed that the 'Eastern Pact scheme will almost certainly end in a fiasco'. However, he wished to put this to the French when they arrived, in order to persuade them to find some way that 'Litvinov [could] be satisfied in some other manner'.<sup>24</sup> The entire matter required study.

Sargent had made an earlier attempt to do this.<sup>25</sup> In his appreciation, he noted that the initiative for the pact had come from Soviet Russia, which was interested only in its own security. The Eastern Pact was a *faute de mieux* for Moscow, which preferred a bilateral Franco-Russian

<sup>22</sup> Fergusson's untitled memo for N. Chamberlain, 15 Jan 1935, Edwardes's confidential note, 14 Jan 1935, and Fisher's memo, 21 Jan 1935, all T 172/1831; Antony Best, "'That Loyal British Subject'?" Arthur Edwardes and Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1932–1941', in J. E. Hoare, ed., *Britain and Japan. Biographical Portraits*, vol. III (Richmond, 1999), 227–39.

<sup>23</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 16 Jan 1927, in Robert Self, ed., *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. II, *The Reform Years, 1921–1927* (Aldershot, 2000), 387.

<sup>24</sup> Chilton to FO, disp 56, 25 Jan 1935, FO 371/18824/C369/25/18, minutes, Creswell (CD) 5 Feb, Collier (6 Feb), Sargent (6 Feb) and Vansittart (7 Feb).

<sup>25</sup> This paragraph and the following one are based on 'The Proposed Eastern Pact', Sargent, 28 Jan 1935, FO 371/18825/C962/55/18, minutes, Vansittart (28 Jan) and Eden (29 Jan); also 'Russia's Probable Attitude towards a "General Settlement" with Germany, and the Proposed Air Agreement', Sargent, 7 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1471/55/18.

agreement. Reflecting O'Malley's earlier contentions, Sargent argued that the Danubian Pact made the Soviets fear that they were becoming less important in French considerations of security, something that the forthcoming Anglo-French talks were likely to reinforce. Sargent thought it likely that the French had been receptive to the Soviet proposals only because Britain would offer not even a 'whispered assurance' of support.

Sargent averred that the British had given lukewarm support to the Eastern Pact in the summer of 1934 for two reasons: '(a) because, and on condition that, the pact would enable the disarmament negotiations to be resumed; and (b) because they hoped in this way to prevent a Franco-Russian alliance'. The Eastern Pact negotiations had now become an impediment to the renewal of arms negotiations because the Germans could 'plausibly' argue that they were willing to enter into talks, but not if it meant accepting a multilateral agreement. And, Sargent felt, only 'the offer of a British alliance' – which he deemed impossible – could prevent a Franco-Russian alliance. He loathed the latter: 'But the prospect of a return to the pre-war grouping of Powers is so horrible – and a Franco-Russian alliance would be the first step towards it and would be quickly followed by others – that I feel we ought to be able to show that in all events we had exhausted every method in order to prevent this development.' Vansittart agreed that the British should try to move the French, but believed that if 'the Franco-Russian alliance sh[oul]d come about, silence w[oul]d be best on our part'. Like Sargent, Eden wanted to ensure any public censure for a Franco-Russian alliance fell on the Germans.

When the Anglo-French talks began, there were Soviet concerns. As Sargent had predicted, the Soviets argued that the discussions adumbrated the formation of 'a western bloc . . . ultimately against Soviet interests'. Chilston warned that if the Soviets felt abandoned by France this would mean that the Eastern Pact was dead and that 'some entirely new orientation [in Soviet foreign policy] may necessarily have to be sought'. At the Foreign Office there was speculation about this possible 'new orientation'. J. V. Perowne suggested that Moscow might look in the direction of 'Japan or the US'. Collier had a more frightening possibility. 'If the Germans play their cards well', he suggested, 'they might overturn Litvinov by offering a return to the "Rapallo policy" – which would be very unpleasant for us and the French; but we can probably rely on Hitler's anti-communist complex and the influence of Rosenberg to prevent that, for the present at least.'<sup>26</sup> Vansittart had his

<sup>26</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 10, 4 Feb 1935, FO 371/18825/C940/55/18, minutes, Perowne (CD) 5 Feb and Collier (6 Feb).

own explanation: 'It is simply "sacred egoism"'.<sup>27</sup> None the less, while Litvinov seemingly grew less concerned about the import of the London talks, it was agreed to keep him informed of the negotiations lest his suspicions be reborn.<sup>28</sup>

As London waited for the German answer to the joint communiqué that the Anglo-French conference spawned on 3 February – a proposal for a general settlement (including the Eastern Pact and the Danubian Pact), an air pact, the return of Germany to the League and a wider armaments agreement – opinion hardened that Berlin would reject the entire idea.<sup>29</sup> In mid-February, the Foreign Office thus made a concerted effort to fathom the tangled relationship between Britain, Soviet Russia, Germany and Japan.<sup>30</sup> Collier, Wigram and Orde attempted to 'summarise the views' of their departments. Their analysis was straightforward: Soviet Russia, fearing Japan and Germany, was pursuing a policy of supporting the 'present territorial *status quo* in Europe and in Asia'. This had led to Moscow's joining the League and pursuing *rap-prochements* with France and Britain. This policy would last only as long as Soviet fears lasted. A warming in Russo-Japanese relations as a result of Japan's actions was viewed as unlikely. However, such a trend was 'not impossible' should Soviet Russia become afraid for its position in Europe. There was a 'growing volume of opinion' in both Germany and Soviet Russia in favour of better relations between them. Thus, the three department heads judged the Soviets to be firmly in the camp of the 'anti-revisionists' as long as their security was enhanced, but only that long.

The major problem for all this was the foreign policy of Pierre Laval, the new French foreign minister. Laval's efforts in December 1934 and January 1935 to improve Franco-German relations and to allow Germany to rearm within the context of international agreement threatened Soviet security unless Germany rejoined the League and accepted the Eastern Locarno proposal.<sup>31</sup> The three department heads argued that, as Britain had gained much from improved relations with Moscow, London should try to ensure that Soviet Russia did not cease

<sup>27</sup> Vansittart's minute (7 Feb) on Sargent's conversation with Czechoslovak minister, 6 Feb 1935, FO 371/18826/C1132/55/18.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes on Chilston to FO, tel 11, 7 Feb 1935, FO 371/18825/C1040/55/18, and Chilston to FO, disp 72, 8 Feb 1935, FO 371/18826/C1278/55/18.

<sup>29</sup> David Dutton, *Simon. A Political Biography of Sir John Simon* (London, 1992), 193–6; the German opinion can be found in Phipps to FO, tel 44, 8 Feb 1935, FO 371/18825/C1076/55/18.

<sup>30</sup> This and the following two paragraphs, except where otherwise noted, are based on untitled memo by Collier, Wigram and Orde, 12 Feb 1935, minute, Vansittart (18 Feb), FO 371/19460/N927/135/38.

<sup>31</sup> Lisanne Radice, 'The Eastern Pact 1933–1935: A Last Attempt at European Co-Operation', *SEER*, 55, 1 (1977), 53–6; Nicholas Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*,

to believe that Britain was attempting to oppose Japan and Germany. How was this to be done? The Eastern Pact had flaws that seemed insuperable. The answer was to accept Sargent's 'horrible' solution. In this circumstance, 'we must not shrink from envisaging the conclusion of some agreement by which the French and Soviet Governments will give each other mutual guarantees of support', despite the potential increase in Britain's commitment under the Locarno Pact.

One of the authors soon had second thoughts. Orde worried about Locarno, and thought that a Franco-Soviet alliance might engender a German-Japanese grouping. Collier did not accept this latter point, and stated that he also did not believe that 'any large body of public opinion here cared two hoots about the so-called encirclement of Germany' that a Franco-Soviet alliance might appear to create. Vansittart termed the memorandum 'wise & excellent', and noted that it was 'very much a British interest also' to expand the Eastern Pact in the way that Soviet Russia wished. After some emendations to accommodate Orde's and Collier's points, the PUS circulated the memorandum to Chilston and Phipps.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, there was steady activity designed to persuade the French to make the Eastern Pact acceptable to Germany, to reassure Maisky that Soviet concerns about German rearmament were being considered and to show that Britain had no intention of leaving Moscow on its own in the pursuit of Germany. This was a delicate business. As Sargent noted, 'we don't want to give them [the Soviets] an exaggerated sense of their own importance or to suggest to them that they can dictate our German policy to us'. Vansittart explained this carefully to Chilston: 'we are very conscious of the importance of Russia in the present situation and of not doing anything which might make her feel that we and France were going to leave her in the lurch and that therefore she had best make terms with Germany before it is too late'.<sup>33</sup> None the less, the Foreign Office continued to try to find some modification of the Eastern Pact that would be acceptable to all.<sup>34</sup>

1934-1936 (New York, 1984), 61-5, 83-92; Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe. The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1918-1940* (Cambridge, 1992), 32-4.

<sup>32</sup> 'International Position of the Soviet Union in relation to France, Germany, and Japan', Vansittart, 22 Feb 1935, FO 371/19460/N880/135/38; Vansittart to Chilston, 21 Feb 1935, FO 371/18826/C1339/55/18.

<sup>33</sup> Vansittart's conversation with the French ambassador, 14 Feb 1935, FO 371/18826/C1225/55/18; FO to Chilston, tel 13, 15 Feb 1935, Sargent Papers, FO 800/273; FO to Clerk, tel 32, 19 Feb 1935, FO 800/273; Simon to Chilston, disp 98, 20 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1429/55/18; Chilston to FO, tel 15, 18 Feb 1935, FO 371/18826/C1339/55/18, minutes, Wigram (19 Feb), Sargent (19 Feb) and Vansittart to Chilston (21 Feb).

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, Phipps to FO, tel 70, 23 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1507/55/18.

These concerns about Soviet susceptibilities were not always shared. At the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament on 19 February, Simon worried that, if the British were to insist on the Eastern Pact as a *sine qua non* for the air pact, this might lead the Germans to reject them both. MacDonald warned that, while the Russians might believe that the Eastern Pact was more important than Germany's return to the League or a disarmament agreement, 'we . . . must fight our own battles'. Chamberlain took the same position, but Eden argued that the Eastern Pact was 'the key to the whole question of a European arms agreement'. His, however, was the minority view, and it was agreed that any British mission to Berlin should go without preconditions as to the Eastern Pact.<sup>35</sup> To allay Soviet fears, Simon told Maisky that the British unwillingness to support the Eastern Pact did not represent any desire to encourage German obstructiveness towards the agreement.<sup>36</sup>

At Simon's request, Vansittart took another tack.<sup>37</sup> He recommended that any trip to Berlin should be followed by a visit to Moscow to ease Soviet concerns that a Western bloc was being formed against them.<sup>38</sup> The PUS lobbied MacDonald to support this idea.<sup>39</sup> By 22 February, Vansittart was confident that the entire issue would be handled with regard for all susceptibilities.<sup>40</sup> However, when the matter was discussed in Cabinet, on 25 February, Vansittart's solution was rejected. It was agreed that Simon should go to Paris and then to Berlin, but the decision as to whether to carry on to the Soviet capital, as the Soviets wished, was reserved.<sup>41</sup>

At the Foreign Office, there was continued lobbying for the Moscow trip, particularly in light of the German efforts to block it (although a French suggestion that the British use the Moscow trip as a weapon to blackmail the Germans into accepting the Anglo-French terms was rejected).<sup>42</sup> But this did not mean that there was agreement that, if an Eastern Pact were blocked, a Franco-Soviet agreement should be signed. For Sargent, any Franco-Soviet pact remained unacceptable; it would be

<sup>35</sup> DC(M) 32, minutes 60th meeting, 19 Feb 1935, Cab 27/508.

<sup>36</sup> Simon to Chilston, disp 98, 20 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1429/55/18.

<sup>37</sup> 'Relations with Soviet Russia. Note by Sir John Simon (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) covering a memo by Sir Robert Vansittart (Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs', CP 41(35), 22 Feb 1935, Cab 24/253.

<sup>38</sup> Dutton, *Simon*, 196–7.

<sup>39</sup> MacDonald diary entry, 20 Feb 1935, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/1.

<sup>40</sup> Vansittart to Phipps, 22 Feb 1935, Phipps Papers, PHPP 2/17.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes, Cab 11(35), 25 Feb 1935, Cab 23/81.

<sup>42</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 74, 26 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1557/55/18, minutes, Collier (nd, but 27–28 Feb), Sargent (28 Feb) and Vansittart (28 Feb); Phipps to FO, tel 78, 27 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1608/55/18.

the 'signal for an immediate re-grouping of the Powers under the pre-war system of the balance of power, organised on the basis of exclusive mutually antagonistic alliances. It would thus mean the final abandonment of the collective peace system, and all that it stands for.' Collier disagreed. He argued that 'we are really already back in the days of the "balance of power" and that it is hopeless to expect anything else in dealing with such protagonists of "sacro egoismo" as Messrs. Hitler, Mussolini, Pilsudski and Stalin'.<sup>43</sup> The disagreement that would characterize the relationship between the two over the next several years was manifest. But, until the Cabinet changed its mind, the trip to Moscow was in limbo.

There was another aspect to British policy towards Soviet Russia, an argument that Britain should base its foreign policy on friendship with Japan.<sup>44</sup> Sir Robert Clive, the British ambassador at Tokyo, contended that Britain's interests could best be guaranteed by moving closer to Tokyo and that this need not offend either the United States, China or Soviet Russia. He also believed that Anglo-American co-operation in the Far East was a chimera. As to possible Russo-American co-operation against Japan, Clive was dismissive. Views in London were divided. Orde was generally in agreement with Clive, but not with the ambassador's arguments concerning the United States. Craigie also wished for an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*, but in the context of a tripartite arrangement with the United States.<sup>45</sup> Vansittart's minute of 2 March highlighted the complexity of the situation:

We are all keenly concerned to keep on good terms with Japan. We have no illusions whatever about her: she means to dominate the East as Germany means to dominate Europe. We have to play for time, and to avoid clashes in our own interests. After very careful examination we are united in finding that there is no golden road in this policy. We have to feel our way carefully from day to day and year to year.

Vansittart was intensely worried about the direction of policy and, particularly, about Simon's ability to carry it out. On 3 March, the PUS took the highly unusual step of obtaining a private interview with MacDonald and warning the prime minister that the Foreign Office lacked

<sup>43</sup> Minutes, Sargent (28 Feb) and Collier (28 Feb) on Clerk to FO, tel 31, 26 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1558/55/18.

<sup>44</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Clive to FO, disp 8, 7 Jan 1935, FO 371/19359/F1090/483/23, minutes, Collier (nd, but c. 27 Feb), Orde (28 Feb) and Vansittart (2 Mar); Clive to Wellesley, 16 Jan 1935, FO 371/19347/13/23.

<sup>45</sup> 'Memorandum', Craigie, 14 Feb, covering Clive to FO, tel 43, 8 Feb 1935 FO 371/18732/A2287/22/45.



confidence in Simon.<sup>46</sup> Vansittart begged MacDonald to ensure that Eden accompanied the foreign secretary on the latter's trip to Berlin in order to ensure a proper defence of British interests. Clearly, at the beginning of March 1935, British policy needed to proceed cautiously, both in Europe and in the Far East.

That month was full of events. On 4 March the British published their White Paper on defence, leading to Hitler's diplomatic illness and the delay of Simon's visit to Berlin.<sup>47</sup> The Cabinet's response was firm. On 6 March, it was decided that Eden should accompany Simon to Berlin when and if that visit took place and that the Privy Seal should continue on from the German capital to Moscow.<sup>48</sup> That same day, the Soviets chided the British for, first, permitting German rearmament and then allowing themselves to be bluffed into delaying their visit.<sup>49</sup> 'Hitler's tantrums', as Sargent described the German leader's reaction to the White Paper, were not to deflect the British from their visits.<sup>50</sup> In the meantime, the Foreign Office continued to discuss the nature of Franco-Soviet relations and their impact on British policy. Clerk asserted that the French were relying on Soviet resources and industrial power to check German ambitions.<sup>51</sup>

But, from Moscow, Chilston held that Soviet Russia's strength was less than the French believed, and that, in any case, it was unlikely to be put at their disposal. Collier argued simply that a Franco-Soviet combination would 'check that [German expansion to the East] as nothing else could'. Sargent did not accept this view. The assistant undersecretary was unhappy with the way that Soviet policies seemed to be determining French and, indirectly, British policy. He expressed 'surprise at the way the French have let themselves be bluffed & dazed by Russian threats & promises'. 'If Russia is allowed', he continued, 'to dictate to France – & ourselves – the conditions on which we are to carry on the affairs of western Europe – for that is what it is rapidly coming to – we may say goodbye to any European settlement.' 'We shall have all our time cut out', he concluded, 'in pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for Mr. Litvinoff!'<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> MacDonald diary entry, 3 Mar 1935, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/2.

<sup>47</sup> MacDonald diary entry, 5 Mar 1935, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1753/2; Phipps to FO, tels 88 and 92, 5 and 6 Mar 1935, FO 371/19928/C1774 and C1778/55/18.

<sup>48</sup> Minutes, Cab 13(35), 6 Mar 1935, Cab 23/81.

<sup>49</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 26, 6 Mar 1935, FO 371/18828/C1813/55/18.

<sup>50</sup> Sargent to Phipps, 7 Mar 1935, Phipps Papers, PHPP 2/10; Hankey to Phipps, 8 Mar 1935, Phipps Papers, PHPP 3/3; N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 9 Mar 1935, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/908.

<sup>51</sup> Clerk to FO, tel 31, 26 Feb 1935, FO 371/18827/C1558/55/18.

<sup>52</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 110, 9 Mar 1935, FO 371/19456/N1313/53/38, minutes, Collier (18 Mar) and Sargent (22 Mar).



In fact, Strang, now returned from Moscow and serving as the adviser on League of Nations affairs, felt that Soviet Russia's involvement made any chance of an arms settlement slight. In his opinion, Germany was on the verge of denouncing the disarmament clauses of the treaty of Versailles. The British had two choices: '(in combination with the French and such other Gov[ernmen]ts as will join us) to outbuild and encircle Germany; or make a general arms agreement on the best terms we can get'. He hoped that the French would be satisfied with getting Germany to agree to an air pact and to rejoin the League. He also felt that France would abandon the Eastern Pact 'if their friends [Soviet Russia and the Little Entente] will let them'. Sargent put it bluntly: 'The entry of Russia on the scene as the ally to all intents and purposes of France has, I am afraid, wrecked the last chances there were of obtaining agreement for limiting armaments at a reasonable figure.'<sup>53</sup>

Strang's fears were quickly realized. On 16 March, Hitler dropped a bombshell, announcing that Germany would rearm.<sup>54</sup> Despite pressure from the French to cancel the trip to Berlin (which would have meant also cancelling the Moscow leg), the British were determined to ensure that 'if there is a break [to] let it be by the direct action of Germany'.<sup>55</sup> In Moscow, the Soviet press was savage in its denunciation of the British response to Hitler, which continued to refer to the idea of a general settlement. This, Collier noted, would complicate Eden's mission to Moscow because of the 'suspicions of British policy which he [Litvinov] now undoubtedly entertains – and which, I venture to think, it is not wholly unnatural for him to entertain'.<sup>56</sup> Vansittart concurred. 'I had never contemplated', he lamented on 19 March, 'that H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] were going to rush their fences in this tragic manner. The results are plain for all to see. We have forfeited confidence all round.' The consequences – 'bad enough' everywhere – for Eden's trip to Moscow would be profound: 'They will be worse in Russia – given the suspicious nature of the Soviet Govt . . . Eden will have a very bad start for his Russian venture. He will have all his work cut out to recover lost ground – & I doubt if it *can* be recovered.'<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Strang's minute (13 Mar), Sargent's (13 Mar) on Phipps to FO, tel 64, 11 Mar 1935, FO 371/18829/C1991/55/18.

<sup>54</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 110, 16 Mar 1935, FO 371/18829/C2121/55/18.

<sup>55</sup> MacDonald diary entry, 17 Mar 1935, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/57/1753/2.

<sup>56</sup> Chilton to FO, tel 37, 18 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1370/1167/38, minutes, Collier (19 Mar) and Vansittart (19 Mar); minutes, Cab 15(35), 18 Mar 1935, Cab 23/81.

<sup>57</sup> His minute (19 Mar) on Chilton to FO, disp 33, 21 Jan 1935, FO 371/19450/N524/17/38.

Despite this, preparations went on for the visit to Moscow.<sup>58</sup> Before the German announcements, Eden had been optimistic about the trip to the Soviet capital, noting that the 'Russians seem to be really anxious to play up and I have some faint hopes that we may be able to secure results of some practical value'.<sup>59</sup> His optimism resulted from two conversations with Maisky. The Soviet ambassador had laid emphasis on the importance of the trip and had noted that he would join Eden at Berlin for the trip to Moscow.<sup>60</sup> However, in the aftermath of Hitler's announcements, all the entrails were carefully examined, and the ominous official silence from Moscow in the week preceding Eden's arrival seemed 'not propitious' for any progress in Anglo-Soviet talks.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, in an attempt to prepare the way for both the Soviet and German trips, Eden travelled to Paris on 23 March to meet with both the French and the Italians.<sup>62</sup> There, the French made it clear that, should Germany reject the Eastern Pact, they intended to negotiate 'some agreement' with Soviet Russia.<sup>63</sup> The talks in Berlin made this likely. On 25 March, Hitler rejected any form of an Eastern Pact that involved mutual assistance – Germany was 'more afraid of Russian protection than of a French attack'.<sup>64</sup> In fact, Hitler dropped hints that Britain and Germany had a common enemy in Bolshevism, hints that Simon and Eden politely ignored.<sup>65</sup> At the Foreign Office, given Hitler's rejection of the Eastern Pact, Sargent was concerned about possible unilateral French action. He preferred that London and Paris not do anything until both the final German reply was received and the two nations could discuss matters at the forthcoming meeting at Stresa in April.

Eden spent the thirty-six hours on the train from Berlin to Moscow pondering the question 'does a basis now exist for a general European

<sup>58</sup> Minutes, Chilston to FO, disp 524, 21 Jan 1935, FO 371/19450/N524/17/38; Collier's minute, 20 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1480/1167/38; Collier's minute, 21 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1481/1167/38.

<sup>59</sup> Eden to Cadogan, 15 Mar 1935, Avon Papers, AP 14/1/405B.

<sup>60</sup> Eden's two conversations with Maisky, 12 and 14 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1270 and N1329/1167/38.

<sup>61</sup> Minute, Dodds on Chilston to FO, tel 42, 26 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1539/1167/38.

<sup>62</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 87; Minutes, Cab 16(35), 20 Mar 1935, Cab 23/81.

<sup>63</sup> Minutes of meeting, 23 Mar, in Clerk to FO, urgent disp 467, 23 Mar 1935, FO 371/18832/C2456/55/18, minutes, Sargent (26 Mar) and Vansittart (26 Mar).

<sup>64</sup> 'Note of Anglo-German Conversations . . . on 25 and 26 March 1935', secret, CP 69 (35), Cab 24/254.

<sup>65</sup> Soviet agents obtained the text of this meeting, and emended it to suit Stalin's prejudices, creating the impression there was an Anglo-German plot to drive the Germans East; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive. The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 2000), 71–2.

settlement?' His time in Berlin had raised the Privy Seal's doubts, and he now wondered 'whether there may not be only one course of action open to us: to join with those Powers who are members of the League of Nations in re-affirming our faith in that institution and our determination to uphold the principles of the Covenant'.<sup>66</sup> When Eden arrived in Moscow on 28 March, he immediately telegraphed for clarification on two issues: first, would the government object to a modified Eastern Pact consisting of Soviet Russia, the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia and France, with a provision that Germany and Poland could join later; second, could Eden invite Soviet representatives to London for bilateral talks about naval armaments in the same fashion as had been done with Germany? The replies were straightforward; there could be no objection to the modified pact 'provided that the accession to Poland and Germany was kept open, and provided that it operated under the auspices of the League'. However, Simon hoped that any such agreement could be delayed until after Stresa in order to keep 'the whole situation . . . as fluid as possible'. Simon favoured the naval suggestion, although he wished to keep the Anglo-German discussions secret if possible 'in view of Japanese susceptibilities'.<sup>67</sup>

On 28 and 29 March, Eden spoke with Litvinov. With Strang (who had accompanied Eden) and Chilston present, Litvinov outlined his concerns and uncertainties about the future of eastern Europe and Soviet policy. He was, however, convinced that the Powers must continue to adhere to the collective system. This would thwart Hitler who 'was building his policy upon the assumption of continued antagonism between Great Britain and the Soviet Union'.<sup>68</sup> The Soviet foreign minister made it plain that such a policy also extended beyond Europe. If the Powers stood firm, then Germany might have to change its policy in the same way that Japan had done because of Soviet Russia's increasing power in the Far East. Litvinov concluded by asserting that, while the two revisionist states 'had the same mentality', Soviet Russia desired 'mutual assistance' against threats from Germany and was improving its relations with Japan in order to obtain it. Eden accepted this, and noted that, in the Far East, 'there was no idea of [Britain's] doing a deal with

<sup>66</sup> Chilston (for Eden) to FO, tel 45, 28 Mar 1935, FO 371/18832/C2593/55/18.

<sup>67</sup> Chilston (for Eden) to FO, tel 44, 28 Mar 1935, FO 371/19468/N1581/1167/38, minutes, Vansittart, Sargent and Simon (all 28 Mar); Simon's reply to Chilston, tel 62, 28 Mar 1935; untitled secret minute, Craigie, 5 Apr 1935, FO 371/18733/A3755/22/45.

<sup>68</sup> 'Records of Anglo-Soviet Conversations held at the Peoples' Commissariat for Foreign Affairs Moscow, on March 28, 1935 . . . [and] March 29', with Chilston to FO, disp 139, 30 Mar 1935, FO 371/18833/C2726/55/18.

Japan at the expense of either China or the Soviet Union'. After a somewhat comic discussion of British objections to Soviet propaganda – a propaganda hotly denied by Litvinov – the two sides agreed that more communication in future between the two states was the best way of improving Anglo-Soviet relations.<sup>69</sup>

In the afternoon of 29 March, Eden spoke with Stalin and Molotov. Eden found Stalin a man of 'remarkable knowledge and understanding of international affairs'. The Soviet dictator stated that things were 'fundamentally worse' than in 1913 because of two threats: Japan and Germany. The former, he argued, wanted to overthrow the Chinese government, while the Germans wanted revenge for the humiliations of Versailles. Britain, Stalin contended, had an important role to play due to its 'power and influence [and] . . . it would be fatal to drift since there was no time to lose if a check were to be placed on a potential aggressor'. For his part, Eden told Stalin not to think that Britain, despite its 'active and impressionable public opinion', might be afraid to act. He also attempted to allay Stalin's mistrust of British motives. 'It might be that at times we seemed vacillating or hesitant', the Lord Privy Seal remarked, 'but I begged him to believe that what appeared to him as weakness on our part did not conceal sinister designs at the expense of others.' Eden departed with an accurate picture of Stalin. The '[i]mpression left upon us', he concluded, 'was of a man of strong oriental traits of character with unshakeable assurance and control whose courtesy in no way hid from us an implacable ruthlessness'.<sup>70</sup>

The Berlin and Moscow trips redounded on British preparations for Stresa. Sargent argued strongly against a Franco-Russian alliance. Such an agreement would stir memories of 1914 and remind the British public that France had been drawn into the war because it was an ally of Russia. Parliament would be 'far more chary of implementing our Locarno obligations than they are at present, when France's foreign policy is supposed to be entirely independent'. Second, the Berlin talks had made it clear that, even if rebuffed in his demand for an unmodified Eastern Pact, Litvinov had no likelihood of being able to conclude a German alliance, despite his threats. Third, France's security would not be enhanced by an agreement with Moscow both because of Soviet military weakness and because Hitler's aims were to expand eastward. In that case, '[i]t must be fairly obvious to the French themselves that Russia's idea of an alliance with France is that it is France who is to pull the

<sup>69</sup> The FED agreed: minute (4 Apr), Allen on Chilton to FO, tel 46, 28 Mar 1935, FO 371/18832/C2608/55/18.

<sup>70</sup> Chilton to FO, tels 48 and 49, 29 Mar 1935, FO 371/18833/C2689 and C2690/55/18.

chestnuts out of the fire for Russia'. Fourth, 'an undisguised Franco-Russian military alliance would bring about a German-Japanese alliance, which would be bound to have immediate and disagreeable reactions on British policy both in Europe and the Far East'. Finally, if a Franco-Soviet alliance were to block German expansion in the East, it would look to the Balkans, which would lead to Italy's 'clamouring for a Franco-Italian alliance' to check Germany. If France were to grant the latter, then once more Paris would have incurred large obligations. If France were not to grant it, then Italy might 'veer round and rush back into the arms of Germany'. Given all this, Sargent hoped that, 'for France's sake as well as our own, we will at Stresa do all we can to prevent the conclusion of a direct Franco-Russian military alliance directed against Germany'. Vansittart accepted most of these arguments, but he urged Sargent to be 'careful how far we push this affirmation [that Germany would expand in the East]'. The PUS was convinced that Germany would refuse to contribute to collective security. In that case, to prevent a Franco-Soviet alliance, Britain needed to show 'our own solidarity at Stresa and by urging that collective security, under the League and with or without Germany, is the real answer'.<sup>71</sup> But, in any case, a Franco-Soviet alliance would block any discussion of arms control at Stresa.<sup>72</sup>

When the final German reply to the Anglo-French communiqué – rejecting a concrete Eastern Pact embodying any form of mutual assistance, but agreeing to vague consultation and bilateral non-aggression and arbitration treaties – arrived on 3 April, the British found themselves 'in the realm of stern reality'. Sargent noted that Britain 'face[d] three alternatives'. The first was to accept the German reply; the second was to pursue the idea of an Eastern Locarno without Germany and Poland (leaving the door open for their later accession); the third was to accept a 'Franco-Russian military alliance, to which Czechoslovakia might be a party, specifically directed against Germany'. As always, Sargent rejected the third possibility out of hand. For him, the choice was between the first and second. Sargent felt that the first alternative maintained collective security and that to reject it would lead to German accusations that 'this eminently reasonable offer' had been rejected 'at the bidding of Russia'. For this reason, he suggested discovering whether the French had 'definitely made up their minds, or rather pledged

<sup>71</sup> Based on minute, Sargent (1 Apr) on Clerk to FO, disp 493, 28 Mar 1935, FO 371/18833/C2656/55/18, and Vansittart's undated marginalia and minute; also M. L. Roi, 'From the Stresa Front to the Triple Entente: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Abyssinian Crisis and the Containment of Germany', *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 61–7.

<sup>72</sup> 'Memorandum. The attainment by Germany of air parity with France and ourselves', Creswell, 1 Apr 1935, minutes, FO 371/18835/C3087/G.

themselves to the Russians on the subject'. Vansittart preferred to do this at Stresa, where 'the personal touch will give it a better chance of consideration [by the French]'.<sup>73</sup> This decision likely reflected the unwillingness of the French ambassador to Britain, Charles Corbin, to be 'drawn too far' on the subject.<sup>74</sup>

There were other currents of thought about Stresa. E. H. Carr, the assistant adviser on League of Nations affairs, felt that Britain had to define its position clearly and cease the policy of 'issuing declarations, resolutions, joint communiqués, protests and demands which we have not, when it came to the point, been willing or able to enforce'.<sup>75</sup> Robert Cecil, the long-time advocate of disarmament and former member of the government, argued that Stresa would increase both German contentions that the Reich was being 'encircled' and Soviet 'anxiety and suspicion' about the intentions of the Western Powers.<sup>76</sup> Certainly, there was some thinking that, no doubt, would have raised such Soviet anxieties and suspicions. In Berlin, Phipps pointed out that 'if we erect too much barbed wire, whether along Hitler's southern or eastern frontier, we will head the beast back to the west, or start him on some new venture, say overseas'. Since the French preferred the 'shadow' of the Eastern Pact to the 'substance' of arms control, the ambassador went on: 'I suppose we shall have to choose between a policy of disinterest in Europe and a fresh policy of isolating or encircling Germany.' Sargent's response reflected his doubts about the utility of dealing with the Soviets. 'I have never quite been able to accept the truth of M. Litvinov's dictum about the "indivisibility of peace"; nor can I bring myself to believe in either the willingness or the ability of the Bolshevik Government to maintain peace if it ever came to be threatened in the west.' He reiterated his opinion that the French, as a result of 'momentary panic', had committed themselves to Soviet Russia and now stood 'pledged to raise the eastern "wire fence" every bit as high as that in the west and south'.<sup>77</sup>

Many of these points were discussed in Cabinet on 8 April.<sup>78</sup> The British representatives were instructed to take a position in line with

<sup>73</sup> Wigram, minute, 3 Apr 1935, Sargent's (3 Apr) and Vansittart's (4 April) minutes, all FO 371/18833/C2794/55/18.

<sup>74</sup> FO to Clerk, disp 742, 8 Apr 1935, FO 371/18834/C2960/55/18 outlining Vansittart's conversation with Corbin.

<sup>75</sup> 'Stresa Conference: Austria', Carr, 30 Mar 1935, FO 371/19498/R2201/1/67.

<sup>76</sup> Cecil to Baldwin, 29 Mar 1935, Avon Papers, AP 14/1/411A.

<sup>77</sup> Phipps to Sargent, 4 Apr 1935, FO 371/18834/C2922/55/18, minutes, Creswell (10 Apr) and Sargent (12 Apr).

<sup>78</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Minutes, Cab 20 (35) and Cab 21(35), both 8 Apr 1935, Cab 23/81; 'Memorandum on Questions for Discussion at Stresa Conference', CP 79(35), FO, 4 Apr 1935, Cab 24/254.

Sargent's minutes and Simon's own proclivities, despite Eden's call from his sick bed for a more forceful policy.<sup>79</sup> No break with Germany would be made; instead Germany was to be told, 'with friendliness . . . so that the German people may be impressed morally and spiritually', only that its refusal to join in such projects as the Eastern Pact did not lessen the likelihood of war. But Britain should 'on no account' discourage France and Italy from 'making such security arrangements as they deemed necessary by way of mutual assurances'. The French were to be encouraged to consider the alternative form of the Eastern Pact put forward by Germany, and the idea that Germany and Soviet Russia might jointly guarantee Poland's borders should be bruited. Finally, Britain should take on no commitments beyond its responsibilities under Locarno. While their representatives were physically absent, Soviet Russia's spirit would clearly hover over Stresa.

British policy at Stresa was confined to maintaining a semblance of solidarity with France and Italy, while not antagonizing Germany.<sup>80</sup> The French, warned by the Soviets beforehand that any 'indiscretion' might result in the collapse of the Franco-Soviet front, did not pick up on the British suggestions about the Eastern Pact, but instead promised only to keep the British informed of negotiations between Paris and Moscow.<sup>81</sup> In Moscow, the Soviet press took a predictable position, contrasting the 'firm attitude of France and surprisingly emphatic manifestation of Italo-French solidarity with [the] hesitant and temporising attitude' of Britain. There was 'a distinctly anti-British tone in this', Creswell noted at the Foreign Office, but in London the interest lay more in what the French were doing than in what was the Soviet attitude.<sup>82</sup>

This was because of the impact that any Franco-Soviet agreement might have on Britain's commitments under Locarno and to the League. Laval's unwillingness to outline to the British the nature of the Franco-Soviet discussions likely indicated, Sargent felt, that the French foreign minister was 'preparing for the possibility of having to yield to M. Litvinov's blandishments and pressure'. In such circumstances, Laval would not want the British to be able to raise the Locarno issue

<sup>79</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 95–7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 98–9; Dutton, *Eden*, 42–3; Dutton, *Simon*, 202–4; Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934–1937* (Westport, CT, 1997), 77–82.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933–1939* (London, 1984), 49; 'Eastern Pact', Sargent, 18 Apr 1935, FO 371/18837/C3333/55/18; Loraine to Oliphant, private and confidential, 18 May 1935, Loraine Papers, FO 1011/37.

<sup>82</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 2 saving, 16 Apr 1935, FO 371/18837/C3336/55/18, minute, Creswell (23 Apr).



beforehand and complicate French diplomacy.<sup>83</sup> Vansittart shared Sargent's fears. This was in his mind when, on 26 April, he spoke to Maisky on the issue of Locarno. In response to Maisky's question as to what would be Britain's Locarno responsibilities if Germany attacked Soviet Russia and France went to its assistance, Vansittart replied that, if France were to attack Germany under any but the carefully defined conditions of Locarno, then Britain would have to come to Germany's aid, a move that he hoped would 'help the French' curb the Soviet demands for a pure military alliance.<sup>84</sup>

The PUS had also made other attempts to ensure that the Franco-Soviet discussions were kept within the bounds of existing agreements and did not snub the Germans. At Geneva, after the Stresa meetings, Vansittart had insisted to the French that the German proposal for a modified Eastern Pact could not be 'ignore[d] or reject[ed] . . . out of hand'.<sup>85</sup> Also, he had instructed the British ambassador at Paris to make it clear that the Franco-Soviet arrangement had to be compatible with both Locarno and the League Covenant.<sup>86</sup> As the Franco-Soviet negotiations ground on, the Foreign Office hoped that the French might not be willing to 'throw themselves unreservedly into the arms of the Soviets', and instead might try to move Poland out of the 'German orbit'.<sup>87</sup> However, there was concern that Hitler might use the signing of a Franco-Soviet agreement as 'a pretext for denouncing the Treaty of Locarno'.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, when the Franco-Soviet treaty was signed on 2 May, it was dissected carefully at the Foreign Office.<sup>89</sup> Its form was satisfactory and compatible with both Locarno and the League Covenant. Despite this, however, Wigram noted: 'who can, in the bottom of his heart, suppose that the Franco-Russian agreement is not directed against Germany?'<sup>90</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Minutes, Malkin (legal adviser, FO) and Sargent (both 24 Apr) on Clerk to FO, tel 78, 19 Apr 1935, FO 371/18837/C3328/55/18.

<sup>84</sup> Vansittart's conversation with Maisky, 26 Apr 1935, minutes, Sargent (27 Apr), Malkin (29 Apr) and Vansittart (29 Apr) yielding Vansittart to Maisky, 30 Apr, all FO 371/18838/C3554/55/18.

<sup>85</sup> Minute, Vansittart (25 Apr), on 'Action on the Stresa Resolution, More Particularly with Regard to Germany', Sargent, 24 Apr 1935, FO 371/18843/C4441/55/18.

<sup>86</sup> FO to Clerk, tel 109 pink, 26 Apr 1935, and reply, tel 80, 27 Apr 1935, both FO 371/18838/C3554/55/18.

<sup>87</sup> Minutes, Sargent and Vansittart (both 27 Apr), on Phipps to FO, tel 106 saving, 25 Apr 1935, FO 371/18837/C3438/55/18.

<sup>88</sup> Sargent's minute (1 May) on Clerk to FO, 30 Apr 1935, FO 371/18838/C3527/55/18.

<sup>89</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Clerk to FO, disp 684, 2 May 1935, FO 371/18838/C3613/55/18, minutes, Malkin and Wigram (9 May), Collier (9 May) and Vansittart's marginalia.

<sup>90</sup> The view of the Soviet minister at Ankara, Loraine (minister, Angora) to Oliphant, 20 May 1935, Loraine Papers, FO 1001/37.



But, far from being displeased, the head of the Central Department thought that the treaty might have a 'salutary' effect on Germany. And, although Soviet Russia might be able to dodge its commitment to France, Wigram was convinced that the agreement's value to the French 'is almost entirely negative; its object is to prevent Russia (despite Hitler's thunders against Bolshevism) falling again into the German orbit'. Vansittart and Collier agreed.<sup>91</sup> The British were under no illusion that the Franco-Soviet pact meant that Soviet Russia was becoming pro-Western. Instead, they were convinced that Moscow had acted solely from a desire to preserve its own security.<sup>92</sup> Commenting on the warm reception given to Laval on his visit to Soviet Russia in mid-May, Collier noted that Soviet policy in this respect was like that of Germany and Italy: 'each of them refrains from aggression and preaches peace so long as it pays her, and no longer; and, for the next few years at least, this is likely to pay Russia more than – unfortunately – it pays either of the other two'.<sup>93</sup>

The Soviet attitude was typified by their opposition to any efforts at arms control outside the context of a general settlement, an argument based on their interpretation of the London communiqué of 3 February. Sargent believed that the French should be told firmly that Britain favoured some kind of agreement about air power, even if it appeared to fall outside the February communiqué. However, he also believed that, while Laval would not be 'unreasonable or obstructive' on the matter, 'the real opponent with whom we have to deal in this matter is Litvinov', who would put pressure on the French to veto any deal that did not provide for the 'principle of simultaneity' with regard to Germany's joining the Eastern Pact. Vansittart agreed, but not with Sargent's tactics. The PUS wanted to go slowly and to initiate negotiations before putting pressure on the French.<sup>94</sup> However, both men realized that the French and the Soviets believed that the issue was one of policy, not procedure. Paris and Moscow feared, Sargent believed, that piecemeal negotiation was 'the first step in the disintegration of the united front and the beginning of the policy of independent action

<sup>91</sup> Minutes, Wigram (14 May) and Collier (14 May) on Clerk to FO, tel 93, 10 May 1935, FO 371/18839/C3815/55/18.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathan Haslam, 'The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934–1935', *HJ*, 22, 3 (1979), 673–91.

<sup>93</sup> Collier's minute (24 May) on Charles (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, disp 209, 21 May 1935, FO 371/19456/N2647/53/38.

<sup>94</sup> This and the following paragraph are based on Sargent's untitled memo, 3 Jun 1935, FO 371/18846/C4694/55/18, Vansittart's minute (3 Jun); further in minute, Sargent (5 Jun), FO 371/18845/C3424/55/18.

whereby each country secures its own immediate interests by reaching an agreement with Germany on those matters with which it is itself vitally concerned'.<sup>95</sup> The existence of this view was underlined by what Sargent called a 'very cunning' Soviet note on 5 June. Here, Litvinov enjoined the British not to give Hitler any reason to believe that 'Europe can be divided into regions where peace must be secured and regions where peace need not be secured', an argument that would prevent any separation of arms control from Hitler's willingness to accept the Eastern Pact. Both Collier and Wigram rejected the Soviet interpretation of 'simultaneity'. And Sargent, Vansittart and, most significantly, the new foreign secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, agreed that no formal reply should be given to the note, which Hoare contended was part of 'Litvinov's intrigues to torpedo the air pact'.<sup>96</sup> In the same vein, the British moved unilaterally to conclude an Anglo-German Naval Agreement on 18 June.<sup>97</sup>

Not unexpectedly, the Soviets resented both these moves. Maisky had called at the Foreign Office on 12 June to complain that the British were 'isolating the Air Pact from the questions connected with the Eastern Pact'.<sup>98</sup> But the Foreign Office was determined to pursue arms control regardless of Soviet objections.<sup>99</sup> This determination was reinforced by the Admiralty's anxiety that no 'interminable difficulties' (such as Soviet Russia was thought likely to cause) should be introduced at the present stage of naval negotiations.<sup>100</sup> Instead, the Soviets were merely kept informed, and told that the Anglo-German talks were purely preliminary to a more general naval conference (to which they would be invited).<sup>101</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Sargent's minute (13 Jun 1935) on Clerk to FO, tel 120 saving, 8 Jun 1935 371/18845/C4627/55/18, Vansittart's minute (13 Jun).

<sup>96</sup> Soviet note, 5 Jun 1935, FO 371/18845/C4564/55/18, minutes, Wigram (with Collier, 13 Jun), Sargent (14 Jun), Hoare (14 Jun) and Vansittart (15 Jun).

<sup>97</sup> The Admiralty's perspective is in Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939. A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1998), 11–37; Claire M. Scammell, 'The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935', *JSS*, 20, 2 (1997), 92–118. For diplomatic aspects, see D. C. Watt, 'The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement', *JMH*, 28, 2 (1956), 155–75; Hines H. Hall III, 'The Foreign Policy-Making Process in Great Britain, 1934–1935, and the Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement', *HJ*, 19 (1976), 477–99; Wesley K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy. British Intelligence and Nazi Germany 1933–1939* (Ithaca, 1985), 130–9.

<sup>98</sup> Hoare's conversation with Maisky, 12 Jun 1935, FO 371/19451/N3187/17/38; Charles (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, tel 80, 11 Jun 1935, FO 371/18845/C4660/55/18.

<sup>99</sup> 'Memorandum on Air Pact and Limitation of Air Strength', Wigram and Sargent, 13 Jun 1935, FO 371/18846/C4903/55/18.

<sup>100</sup> Chatfield to Vansittart, 13 Jun 1935, FO 371/18734/A5414/22/45, Craigie's minute (13 Jun).

<sup>101</sup> FO to Chilton, tel 80, 18 Jun 1935, FO 371/18734/A5439/22/45.

Such a suggestion was rejected in Moscow. When informed about the Anglo-German agreement, Litvinov 'more sorrowfully than cynically [said] "Herr Hitler has now a great diplomatic victory"'. The Soviet minister argued that it 'implied the end of Anglo-French cooperation . . . [and] that Germany would now hasten to build as quickly as possible up to the limit which afterwards she would no longer observe'. While Chilston had attempted to counter such assertions, at the Foreign Office Collier noted dispiritedly, 'It is not only M. Litvinov who is saying such things now.'<sup>102</sup>

The Anglo-German agreement had ramifications for Soviet naval defences, which played into Moscow's resentment generally. At the beginning of July, there was a pointed article in *Pravda* outlining the dangers to Leningrad and the Gulf of Finland caused by the naval agreement. This article was couched in terms of 'resentment and dismay', and the fact that the British had 'taken him [Hitler] at his word' was felt to be capable of explanation only by assuming that 'the British Empire, tottering on the verge of collapse, is clutching at straws'. But Collier was perhaps the most perceptive about the greater significance of the article:

The Soviet Gov[ernment] dislike the Anglo-German agreement, not because it makes any difference to the actual ratios of naval strength in the Baltic, but because it seems to them to imply that H[is] M[ajesty's] Government have disinterested themselves in these regions and formally conceded to the Germans the right to do what they like there.<sup>103</sup>

The British had achieved their short-term goal to limit German naval armaments, but the potential cost to finding common ground with Soviet Russia to contain Germany's and Japan's revisionist tendencies was yet to be determined.

The first six months of 1935 had demonstrated the difficulties for any true Anglo-Soviet co-operation. The two nations were not only ideologically poles apart, but also widely separated in their appreciation of how to maintain the *status quo*. The British adhered to the concepts of collective security, and wished to bring Germany back into the comity of nations by acceding to what were felt to be its legitimate demands for

<sup>102</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 85, 20 Jun 1935, FO 371/18734/A5538/22/45, Collier's minute (25 Jun); Soviet press reaction, Chilston to FO, tel 86, 20 Jun 1935, FO 371/18734/A5545/22/45.

<sup>103</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 96, 2 Jul 1935, FO 371/19460/N3338/76/38, minute, Collier (3 Jul); Chilston to FO, disp 288, 2 Jul 1935, FO 371/18735/A5966/22/45. Quotations from dispatch.

equality, while limiting and controlling its rearmament. For the Soviets, British policy was, at best, weak and naive; at worst, it was designed to drive the Germans to the East against Soviet Russia. Moscow was willing to pursue arms control only in the context of wider agreements that promised to curb German revisionism generally. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement was resented as something that broke the connection between these two aims. The Soviets were convinced that Hitler, like the Japanese, could be controlled only by force, and were determined to create the mechanisms to do so. To the British, this smacked of pre-1914 attitudes. They were reluctant to join in agreements in areas where they had no particular interests (such as eastern Europe) and fearful that Soviet Russia would lead France into arrangements that would also commit Britain. For this reason, many of the British policy makers came to resent Soviet initiatives and to see them as selfish, opportunistic and potentially dangerous for Britain. Others, however, disagreed and, to some extent, shared the Soviet view. The next few years would determine which view would prevail, and whether either could provide a new basis for British strategic foreign policy in the era of 'deterrence'.

## 4 Complications and choices: July 1935–February 1936

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The period from the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement until the middle of February 1936 was difficult. In Europe, the Abyssinian crisis complicated matters for British defence planning. In the Far East, tensions remained high between Britain and Japan. These circumstances confronted Britain with difficult choices about the direction of its strategic foreign policy. The ‘deterrence’ period had not yet produced any neat answers for British policy makers. Soviet Russia was important in both Europe and the Far East. In Europe, the major discussions centred round whether German desires could (or should) be accommodated (possibly at the indirect expense of Moscow) or whether they could (or should) be opposed (possibly by means of an alliance with Moscow). In the Far East, the contentious point was whether British interests would best be protected by means of an Anglo-Japanese agreement (at the risk of alienating Soviet Russia, the United States and China) or by the more tenuous means of utilizing the common interest shared by London, Moscow and Washington to check Japan.<sup>1</sup> These sets of decisions were linked: first, by the facts that both Soviet Russia and Britain had interests in both regions, and that the two decisions thus had to be consonant with one another; second, by the fact that Soviet Russia had strategic foreign-policy options, and was by no means a passive player in this process.

It is important to note that major political changes had occurred in London. Early in June, MacDonald resigned and was succeeded by Baldwin. Simon was replaced as foreign secretary by Sir Samuel Hoare. The changes affected strategic foreign policy, particularly as concerned Soviet Russia. In some ways, the impact was direct.<sup>2</sup> MacDonald’s first

<sup>1</sup> Greg Kennedy, ‘1935: A Snapshot of British Imperial Defence in the Far East’, in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., *Far-Flung Lines. Essays in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (Portland, OR, and London, 1997), 190–216.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin. Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), 294–335; analysis in Williamson, ‘Baldwin’s Reputation: Politics and History, 1937–1967’, *HJ*, 47, 1 (2004), 127–68.

government had recognized Russia in 1924; Baldwin's second government had broken relations in 1927. MacDonald believed that Soviet Russia needed to be considered in all affairs; Baldwin had a visceral dislike of communism, seeing it as an even greater scourge than fascism. In other ways, the impact was indirect. MacDonald had always taken an interest in foreign relations. Baldwin was less engaged and preferred to delegate that authority. The two prime ministers also differed in their attitudes towards the United States and Japan. MacDonald had always placed a major emphasis on the role of the United States in all naval matters.<sup>3</sup> This checked those who wished to give a higher priority to improving Anglo-Japanese relations. Under Baldwin, this restraint was lessened. Indeed, despite his understanding of the importance of the United States for British strategic defence policy, Baldwin's own experiences led him to believe that reliance on Washington was dangerous. MacDonald advocated disarmament and the League; Baldwin was to oversee rearmament and was dubious about the League's value.

The change at the Foreign Office was even more dramatic. Hoare had vast experience concerning Soviet Russia. During the First World War, he spent nine months in charge of the British intelligence mission in Russia.<sup>4</sup> In late 1921 and early 1922 he had been the League of Nations's deputy high commissioner for Russian refugees in Asia Minor. Hoare despised the Bolsheviks. 'For the last six months', he wrote to Churchill on 31 May 1919, 'I have been convinced that the whole future of Europe, and indeed of the world, depends upon the Russian settlement and the destruction of Bolshevism.'<sup>5</sup> While in Russia, he had become friends with F. O. Lindley, the counsellor at the British embassy in Petrograd.<sup>6</sup> Lindley also was a fervid opponent of the Bolsheviks. From 1923 to 1929, he had provided the Foreign Office with strongly anti-Bolshevik missives from the legation at Christiana, and had followed this up with similar observations while ambassador to Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Not only were Hoare's friends anti-communist, but his ministerial posts also inclined him in that direction. As secretary of state for air in Baldwin's governments in the 1920s, he was involved in defence

<sup>3</sup> Orest Babij, 'The Second Labour Government and British Maritime Security, 1929–1931', *D&S*, 6, 3 (1995), 645–71.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Cross, *Sir Samuel Hoare, a Political Biography* (London, 1977), 39–51, 60–1; Keith Neilson, "'Joy Rides?'" British Intelligence and Propaganda in Russia, 1914–1917', *HJ*, 24, 4 (1981), 887–9; Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service. The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), 204–8; and Hoare's memoirs, *The Fourth Seal. The End of a Russian Chapter* (London, 1930).

<sup>5</sup> Hoare to Churchill, 31 May 1919, Templewood Papers, II:3.

<sup>6</sup> His letters to his wife, 20, 28 Mar, 25 May 1916, all Templewood Papers II:6.

<sup>7</sup> Lindley to Curzon, disp 18, 1 Feb 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/3728.

planning against communist threats throughout the empire. And, while secretary of state for India in the first National Government, Hoare had been vociferous about the subversive communist threat to India. It was not surprising, then, that at his first meeting as foreign secretary with Maisky, Hoare warned the Soviet ambassador that 'it would be extremely difficult to persuade the Conservatives in this country to accept a pro-Russian policy if the Soviet Government failed to eliminate the sources of trouble that had often poisoned our relations in the past'.<sup>8</sup> Any improvement in Anglo-Soviet affairs would occur only grudgingly with Hoare and Baldwin in power.

Hoare's impact was soon felt at the Foreign Office. His willingness to advocate a particular policy made a sharp contrast with Simon's indecision.<sup>9</sup> A first test for Hoare was the Far East. The Treasury continued its efforts to determine British policy in that area, acting as the driving force behind what Orde called the 'panicky school in this country which wants us to ally ourselves with Japan'.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Chamberlain and Fisher had earlier advocated sending a financial expert to China to bolster and stabilize that country's economy, as well as to prevent any precipitate Japanese action.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, the chief economic adviser to the government, was sent to the Far East. By the end of July, it also was apparent that the Treasury wished to give a loan to China. Granting such a loan was deprecated by the Far Eastern Department. They believed that it would have no practical result, and would be opposed and resented by the Japanese unless they were allowed to participate in it.<sup>12</sup> Hoare rejected his department's reservations. Primed by Chamberlain, the foreign secretary informed the Foreign Office that 'I do not at all wish us to take a negative or over-critical attitude to this proposal.' 'There are objections to every possible course of action', Hoare went on, but 'there are equally strong – perhaps in my view stronger – objections to any proposals for inaction.' This limited the Far Eastern Department to 'giv[ing] every warning' to Leith-Ross about potential

<sup>8</sup> Hoare's conversation with Maisky, 12 Jun 1935, FO 371/19451/N3187/17/38.

<sup>9</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 22 Jun 1935, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/923; Baldwin to MacDonald, 26 Jun 1935, Templewood Papers, VIII:1.

<sup>10</sup> Orde to Cadogan, 2 July 1935, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/293.

<sup>11</sup> V. H. Rothwell, 'The Mission of Sir Frederick Leith-Ross to the Far East 1935–1936', *HJ*, 18, 1 (1975), 149–51; Gill Bennett, 'British Policy in the Far East 1933–1936: Treasury and Foreign Office', *MAS*, 26, 3 (1992), 561–4.

<sup>12</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Wellesley's minute (9 Aug) on Leith-Ross to Vansittart, 21 Jul 1935, FO 371/19243/F5081/6/10, Hoare's minute (10 Aug).

difficulties, while hoping that the Leith-Ross mission would at least bring an end to the calls for a “strong” policy’ by commercial lobby groups.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the Foreign Office’s careful balancing of Soviet, Japanese, Chinese and American sensibilities in the Far East was temporarily discarded.

Thus, in the summer and early autumn of 1935, Anglo-Soviet relations involved the British keeping a weather eye both on Soviet–Japanese affairs in the Far East and on the course of Soviet–German relations. Continued incidents on the Soviet–Manchukuo border led to speculation that, despite the final sale of the CER to Japan, a Russo–Japanese war might break out.<sup>14</sup> Both the Foreign and War Offices concluded that continued tension was more likely, a contention reinforced by a conversation with Maisky wherein the Soviet ambassador pronounced that Japan would not dare to attack Soviet Russia unless the former were supported by Germany.<sup>15</sup> This remark was tied to the ongoing Soviet concern about the security implications of the Anglo–German Naval Agreement.<sup>16</sup> Maisky reiterated that Hitler needed to be confronted by a ‘firm peace pact’ based on the League Covenant. This was greeted sceptically at the Foreign Office. Vansittart believed that Moscow’s support for the League was only a cloak for its desire for an alliance with France. ‘I doubt’, the PUS noted, ‘that Russia will prove sturdy for the League if France is wobbly.’<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, and underlining the fear created in Moscow by any possible improvement in Anglo–Japanese relations, Maisky also requested that Leith-Ross make his return from the Far East via Moscow, asserting that ‘the Far Eastern problem was a political, rather than an economic or financial one’.<sup>18</sup> Despite this evidence of Soviet concern about British policy in the Far East, Collier believed that Anglo–Soviet relations would remain cordial. He argued this on the basis that Soviet foreign policy was shaped by ‘their desire to enlist the sympathy and support of any Power interested in and capable of contributing to the maintenance of the territorial *status quo*’. Collier contended that Moscow

<sup>13</sup> Orde’s minute (20 Aug 1935) on Leith-Ross to Orde, 9 Aug 1935, FO 371/19243/F5195/6/10; Orde to Cadogan (ambassador, China), 21 Aug 1935, FO 371/19287/F4447/84/10. Leith-Ross’s memoirs are reticent about the political aspects: *Money Talks. Fifty Years of International Finance* (London, 1968), 195–226.

<sup>14</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 94, 2 Jul 1935, FO 371/19347/F4242/13/23, Gascoigne’s minute (4 Jul); Clive to FO, tel 166, 6 Jul 1935, FO 371/19347/F4366/13/23.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Maisky, F. Ashton-Gwatkin (counsellor, League of Nations and Western Department, FO), 3 Jul 1935, FO 371/19460/N3423/135/38.

<sup>16</sup> Also Chilston to FO, tel 96, 2 Jul 1935, FO 371/19460/N3338/76/38.

<sup>17</sup> Vansittart’s minute (11 Jul) on the conversation cited in n. 15.

<sup>18</sup> This part of Ashton-Gwatkin’s memo is found in FO 371/19242/F4202/6/10.



still put Britain in this category, regardless of both the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Leith-Ross mission. Collier concluded that the Soviets wanted 'to keep us in that camp'.<sup>19</sup>

The German attitude to the Eastern and Franco-Soviet Pacts remained a problem. In July, it became clear that the Germans were going to use the latter both to avoid adhering to the former and to renege on their earlier commitment to conclude a multi-lateral non-aggression pact.<sup>20</sup> While Hoare attempted to dissuade them, the Germans remained obdurate.<sup>21</sup> By the end of July, and despite an apparent French willingness to abandon the Franco-Soviet Treaty if Germany would accede to the Eastern Pact, it was evident that Berlin was not going to budge. The 'only lever' that Vansittart could see that was available to the British was 'publicity'.<sup>22</sup> This would have a dual value: it would put pressure on Berlin and serve to reassure Moscow that the British were keeping them informed (as Eden had promised at Moscow) of any Anglo-German negotiations.<sup>23</sup> To ensure the latter, the Foreign Office provided Chilton with ammunition to rebut the Soviet contention that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement had been sprung on Moscow.<sup>24</sup>

By the end of August, however, a possible new Soviet policy emerged. Ashton-Gwatkin 'gained the impression' that Moscow was willing to give up its advocacy of 'pacts of non-aggression' – including the Eastern Pact – in exchange for a 'substantial loan' from Britain.<sup>25</sup> For Sargent, this meant that the British could follow the Soviet lead and cease pressing the Germans over the Eastern Pact. Hoare agreed, although Ashton-Gwatkin's conversation had actually suggested only that the

<sup>19</sup> Collier to Colonel Ismay (WO), 14 Jul 1935, FO 371/19460/N3489/135/38.

<sup>20</sup> Newton (*chargé d'affaires*, Berlin) to FO, tel 241, 6 Jul 1935, FO 371/18848/C5238/55/18; Newton to FO, disp 678, 9 Jul 1935, FO 371/18848/C5333/55/18; Newton to FO, tel 268, 15 Jul 1935, FO 371/18848/C5422/55/18.

<sup>21</sup> Hoare's conversation with the German ambassador, 23 Jul 1935, FO 371/18849/C5592/55/18.

<sup>22</sup> Newton to FO, tel 246, 30 Jul 1935, FO 371/18849/C5720/55/18; Wigram's untitled memo, 30 Jul 1935, FO 371/18849/C5795/55/18, minutes, Vansittart (30 Jul) and Dodds (15 Aug).

<sup>23</sup> This was effective; see Chilton to FO, tel 115, 19 Aug 1935, FO 371/18850/C6091/55/18.

<sup>24</sup> Dodds to Chilton, 16 Aug 1935, FO 371/19451/N3888/17/38; Holman's (American Department) conversation with Cahan (Soviet embassy), 16 Aug 1935, FO 371/18738/A7345/22/45. For earlier soothing of both the French and the Americans, see Hoare to Clerk, disp 1356, 19 Jul 1935, FO 371/18737/A6441/22/45; Clerk to Vansittart, 25 Jul 1935, FO 371/18737/A6742/22/45; Hoare to Lindsay, 29 Jul 1935, FO 371/18737/A6690/22/45.

<sup>25</sup> Dodds's minute (21 Aug) on Chilton to FO, tel 115, 19 Aug 1935, FO 371/18850/C6091/55/18; the remainder of this paragraph is based on minutes, Sargent (26 Aug), Hoare (28 Aug) and Dodds (3 Sept).

Soviets felt that the damage done to Anglo-Soviet relations by the Anglo-German Naval Convention might be repaired by a loan, not that the Eastern Pact had lost its value.<sup>26</sup> It did not matter which view was correct. By the autumn, everything was complicated by Abyssinia.<sup>27</sup> The direct impact of Soviet Russia in the crisis was slight.<sup>28</sup> While Soviet Russia might need to be involved for oil sanctions against Italy to be successful, for the most part Litvinov remained merely a 'vicarious warrior' and Moscow a critical spectator in the affair.<sup>29</sup> However, despite the minimal direct Soviet involvement, the Abyssinian crisis changed the environment in which Anglo-Soviet relations operated and, perhaps, moved Vansittart, in particular, towards the idea of coming to terms with Soviet Russia as a means of checking Germany now that Italy had dropped out of the Stresa front.<sup>30</sup>

With respect to Abyssinia, Hoare wished to take a firm stand in co-operation with the French.<sup>31</sup> However, he soon discovered that, despite his garnering cross-bench support at home and plaudits in Geneva for advocating such a policy, it caused strategic difficulties.<sup>32</sup> If the RN were strong enough in the Mediterranean to deal with Italy, its deterrent value in the Far East would be lessened. Vansittart was willing to accept this outcome – 'We have reduced our Navy too far and must take the consequences', he noted blackly on 20 September – such an option was deemed to be relatively safe only because Britain's relations with Japan were 'on the whole satisfactory'.<sup>33</sup> But this situation might not last. The Foreign Office believed that the longer the British remained

<sup>26</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 352, 13 Aug 1935, FO 371/19451/N4113/17/38. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement continued as a burr: Charles to FO, disp 414, 17 Sept 1935, FO 371/19438/N4969/231/63.

<sup>27</sup> Reynolds M. Salerno, 'Multilateral Strategy and Diplomacy: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935–1936', *JSS*, 17, 2 (1994), 39–78; M. L. Roi, 'From the Stresa Front to the Triple Entente: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Abyssinian Crisis and the Containment of Germany', *D&S*, 6, 1 (1995), 82–5; Richard Davis, '*Mesentente Cordiale*: The Failure of the Anglo-French Alliance. Anglo-French Relations During the Ethiopian and Rhineland Crises, 1934–1936', *EHQ*, 23 (1993), 513–28.

<sup>28</sup> Drummond to Hoare, 27 Aug 1935, Templewood Papers VIII:3.

<sup>29</sup> Hoare to Eden, 24 Sept 1935, Hoare Papers, FO 800/295.

<sup>30</sup> Roi, 'From the Stresa Front', 82–90.

<sup>31</sup> Cross, *Hoare*, 205–24; Hoare to Eden, 15 Sept 1935, Avon Papers, AP 14/1/450A; Hoare to Chamberlain, 18 Aug 1935, Hoare Papers, FO 800/295.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Marder, 'The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935–1936', *AHR*, 75, 5 (1970), 1327–56; Lawrence R. Pratt, *East of Malta West of Suez. Britain's Mediterranean Crisis 1936–1939* (Cambridge, 1975), 20–33; R. A. C. Parker, 'Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian Crisis, 1935–1936', *EHR*, 89 (1974), 293–332; minutes, 150th meeting COS, 13 Sept 1935, Cab 53/5; Hoare to Eden, 17 Sept and 24 Sept 1935, both Hoare Papers, FO 800/295.

<sup>33</sup> Vansittart's minute (20 Sept) on Randall's (FED) conversation with the Adm (20 Sept 1935), Randall's memo, both FO 371/19305/F6059/309/10.

engaged in the Mediterranean and the weaker they became in the Far East, the more likely Japan would be to take advantage.

This returned attention to the Leith-Ross mission. The Foreign Office had been horrified to discover, early in September, that the government's economic adviser was not merely on an economic mission. Instead, the Treasury had tasked him to improve Anglo-Japanese relations 'in all spheres'. One means of achieving this was to suggest to Tokyo that Japan might reduce its exports, a proposal that Orde felt would 'give violent offence' to the Japanese. Vansittart had managed to tone down the Treasury's instructions, but the possibility that the Treasury and the Foreign Office might pursue two mutually contradictory policies to the detriment of British interests still existed.<sup>34</sup> However, this danger was eased because Hoare's support for the Treasury had waned by the end of September. With the Admiralty's warning on strategic grounds that Japan must be kept sweet, Hoare's earlier support for the Treasury collapsed.<sup>35</sup> On 27 September, Cadogan warned from China that Leith-Ross's efforts might convince Peking that Britain was 'in league with Japan' and lead to adverse results. Hoare enquired contritely: 'Had we better say a word of caution to the Treasury and have a wire sent to Sir F. Leith-Ross asking him to keep in mind the immediate reaction to such a proposal?' Vansittart's reply, 'Yes, this will certainly be wise', was larded with irony.<sup>36</sup> Hoare was beginning to see the problems inherent in the Treasury's meddling. As the Abyssinian crisis deepened, and the need not to offend Japan grew, so, too, did Hoare's concerns about Leith-Ross. At the end of October, the foreign secretary noted plaintively that he did not 'understand the working of Sir Warren Fisher's mind' in advocating a loan to China against Japanese objections, especially when Fisher also continually advocated the need to be friendly to Japan for the sake of limiting naval expenditure.<sup>37</sup>

Soviet Russia was important with respect to these complexities. The Foreign Office, echoing Vansittart at the DRC, contended that, unless Britain were 'heavily engaged elsewhere', Japan would not attack British

<sup>34</sup> Clive to FO, tel 231, 3 Sept 1935, FO 371/19244/F5687/6/10, minutes, Orde (4 Sept) and Vansittart (4 Sept).

<sup>35</sup> Chatfield's remarks, 17th meeting DRC, 10 Oct 1935, Cab 16/112.

<sup>36</sup> Hoare's minute (30 Sept) on Cadogan to FO, tel 60, 27 Sept 1935, FO 371/19244/F6160/6/10, and Vansittart's reply (30 Sept); Cadogan's diary entries, 23, 24, 25 Sept 1935, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/3; Cadogan to Orde, 21 Aug 1935, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/293; Leith-Ross to Runciman, 21 Sept 1935, Runciman Papers, WR 275.

<sup>37</sup> Hoare's minute (29 Oct) on 'Chinese Financial Situation', Orde, 28 Oct 1935, FO 371/19245/F6729/6/10.

interests in the Far East, but rather would assault Soviet Russia.<sup>38</sup> This was a minority view in the defence establishment.<sup>39</sup> For most, the focus was on the Japanese military threat in the Far East and how to contain it. Here, Soviet Russia was central, for only Moscow had the military means to deal with Japan. Continued Japanese pressure in Manchuria both annoyed and frightened the Soviets.<sup>40</sup> The likely result of this, Harcourt-Smith noted, was a 'steady deterioration in Russo-Japanese relations'. This line of analysis was supported by Soviet actions. In mid-October, Litvinov pointed out that Japan was using the cover of the Abyssinian crisis to increase its violations of the Soviet frontier, and he attempted to persuade Britain to support the Soviet position.<sup>41</sup>

The need to do so was underlined by Japanese actions. Anglo-Japanese relations were steadily deteriorating, and Japan was pursuing a policy independent of the Powers in the Far East. The Far Eastern Department emphasized the tangle of considerations. As Gascoigne put it: 'Japan is at present very much mistress of the Far East, America is drawing in her horns, Russia is much occupied at home, and we have been obliged [by Abyssinia] to weaken our squadron in China waters.' Orde lamented: 'The Japanese badly need a beating from somebody; but we at least are not in a position to administer it.'<sup>42</sup> Collier suggested a joint effort to curb Japan: 'I cannot help feeling that we might make more effort than we do now to bring the Russians and the Americans into an anti-Japanese front with us.' He contended that the Comintern's actions should not necessarily prevent Anglo-Soviet co-operation against Japan: 'The Comintern is a nuisance but not a serious menace, and need be no ban to Anglo-Russian collaboration in matters of foreign policy towards third parties.'<sup>43</sup> But, however the 'beating' was to be administered, there was little belief that Japan would soon pursue a pacific policy without the threat of force. It was not surprising that Orde was dismissive of a report from Tokyo that Japanese officers were becoming less anti-British: 'they will probably have to become more frightened of trouble with Russia before they really try to earn our friendship'.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Randall's minute (11 Oct 1935) on 'Strategical Situation in the Far East with Particular Reference to Hong Kong', COS 405, 10 Oct 1935, FO 371/19343/F6416/717/61, Vansittart's minute (12 Oct).

<sup>39</sup> Chatfield's remarks, 18th meeting DRC, 14 Oct 1935, Cab 116/112.

<sup>40</sup> Charles to Collier, 16 Oct 1935, FO 371/19347/F6710/13/23, and minute (5 Nov).

<sup>41</sup> Charles to FO, disp 470, 22 Oct 1935, FO 371/19347/F6689/13/23.

<sup>42</sup> Based on Clive to FO, disp 553, 5 Nov 1935, FO 371/19357/F7579/376/23, minutes (all 9 Dec, except for Collier's 17 Dec).

<sup>43</sup> Collier's minute (14 Dec) on Cadogan to FO, disp 41, 20 Oct 1935, FO 371/19308/F7572/427/10.

<sup>44</sup> Orde's minute (28 Dec) on Clive to FO, tel 350, 27 Dec 1935, FO 371/19357/F8065/376/23.

Soviet Russia was also significant in Europe. In mid-October, there were rumours of an imminent improvement in Soviet–German relations. While this speculation was dismissed, Collier noted that it remained ‘a possibility with which we must reckon’.<sup>45</sup> European politics were made more fluid by Soviet fears that both Britain and France also might abandon the Stresa front and swing their support towards Germany.<sup>46</sup> The War Office was particularly concerned, arguing that a ‘German–Russian Alliance would ultimately entirely dominate continental Europe’ and reduce France and Italy to ‘second class powers’.<sup>47</sup> This circumstance would likely lead to Japan’s joining the Russo–German combination, ‘which would probably mean the end of the British Empire’. In early December, the Foreign Office warned the Treasury that efforts were being made in Berlin to improve German–Soviet trade relations.<sup>48</sup> Problems were everywhere. Opinions varied. These variations must be considered – although they take us away from Anglo–Soviet relations narrowly defined – in order to understand how Soviet Russia affected British strategic foreign policy.

There was an influential sector at the Foreign Office who saw the solution to all the problems in an Anglo–French *rapprochement* with Germany. On 21 November, Sargent and Wigram contended that Britain and France should work together towards an ‘Air Pact and Air Limitation’ and attempt to get Germany back in the League. This could not be done by bargaining away “‘other people’s” possessions in Eastern and Central Europe’, but the duo suggested that ‘a policy of coming to terms with Germany in Western Europe might enable Britain and France to moderate the development of German aims in the Centre and East’. The grip that 1914 had on their thinking was evident. Such a policy faced ‘formidable obstacles’; however,

the British public will expect it to have been attempted, before we proceed to intensive rearmament, or to a further multiplication of defensive pacts which, in the circumstances now emerging in Europe, will soon differ little from what Germany before the war claimed to be the policy of “encirclement”.

The duo believed that what they termed ‘our traditional policy of coming to terms with Germany’ must be continued and that a ‘policy

<sup>45</sup> Charles to FO, disp 453, 17 Oct 1935, FO 371/19460/N5520/76/38, minute; Collier’s minute (4 Dec) on Phipps to FO, disp 1237/27 Nov 1935, FO 371/19460/N6175/76/38.

<sup>46</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 533, 29 Nov 1935, FO 371/19460/N6304/135/38.

<sup>47</sup> ‘The possibility of co-operation between Germany and Russia, and Germany and Japan and the effect of such combinations on British security’, secret, MI3B, 30 Oct 1935, WO 190/368.

<sup>48</sup> Collier to S. D. Waley (Treasury), and L. Browett (B of T), 7 Dec 1935, FO 371/19460/N6340/76/38.

of drift' must be avoided. Without this, there would be the unpleasant possibility of a Russo-German *rapprochement*.<sup>49</sup>

This policy was unacceptable to Collier. He rejected its assertion that Germany must be appeased, arguing that 'rhetorical phrases' had been used by the authors to 'stigmatise the alternatives [that is, other policies] as a "policy of encirclement" and "a policy of drift"'. He felt that Germany's aims in eastern Europe were incompatible with British interests and could not be moderated. To attempt to mollify the Germans 'is not a continuance, but a reversal of our previous policy'. He believed that German ambitions would be checked by other means: 'Russian armaments are becoming strong; the Baltic States are consolidating themselves and, with Russian help, should be able to put up a good fight.' He also rejected the idea that the 'British public' wanted such a policy; the recent election had given the 'Government a mandate without any qualification'. He also opposed other lines of appeasement. While Collier did not advocate Britain's forming any alliances to check Germany, he believed that Berlin could best be deterred by a collective threat of the use of force, including that provided by Soviet Russia.<sup>50</sup>

These arguments were seen by Vansittart on 1 December.<sup>51</sup> The PUS agreed that an effort to come to terms with Germany should be made and that a 'policy of drift' as well as 'a policy of encirclement' had to be avoided. On the other hand, he did not feel that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement had necessarily ushered in an Anglo-German *rapprochement*. Nor was an improvement in Franco-German relations on the cards. While the French foreign minister, Pierre Laval, had a 'strong' desire for such a development, the French Left did not, and Laval's position was weakening. Linking these two possible realignments was the PUS's view that any warming of Russo-German relations was unlikely:

I agree that a Russo-German *rapprochement* cannot be discounted, but that will depend largely on the attitude of France. The Franco-Soviet agreement was designed precisely to prevent this. Unless M. Laval completely destroys the confidence of Russia (and the Little Entente) a Russo-German agreement is possible but not probable.

This had implications for British policy towards both Moscow and Berlin. 'It [a Russo-German *rapprochement*] would become far more

<sup>49</sup> 'Britain, France and Germany', Sargent and Wigram, memo, 21 Nov 1935, FO 371/18851/C7752/55/18.

<sup>50</sup> Untitled memo, Collier, 22 Nov 1935, FO 371/18852/C8523/55/18.

<sup>51</sup> This and the following paragraph are based on Vansittart's untitled memo, 1 Dec 1935, Vansittart Papers, VNST 2/24; original in FO 371/18852/C8524/55/18, and Hoare's minute (3 Dec).

probable if we too took the road to Berlin prematurely. And if we did, and brought about an anxious Russian bid to Berlin, and then failed ourselves?’

On this cautious note, he turned to Collier’s arguments. Vansittart agreed with him that Germany could not be accorded any territories in Europe and that Britain needed to rearm to negotiate. He did not reject – in Collier’s root-and-branch fashion – any accommodation with Germany. While Vansittart accepted the argument that Germany could not be appeased in eastern Europe, he asserted that Berlin might be given some of Britain’s African possessions and that the League Covenant might be revised. Vansittart sent these memoranda to Hoare and Eden, the former noting that he would read them ‘during my holiday’.

There was an unintended irony in this remark. Hoare’s ‘holiday’ ended in his signing of the eponymous pact with Laval that led to the foreign secretary’s forced resignation. December was thus full of political swirl, culminating finally in Eden’s becoming foreign secretary. But, while this was going on, a major re-evaluation of the nature of German–Soviet relations came about. On 16 December, Collier met with Major Hayes from MI2. They agreed that important elements in both Germany and Soviet Russia favoured closer relations between the two states. Hayes was ‘gravely concerned’ about the possibility of ‘a German–Russian *rapprochement* which might eventually include Japan’, and accepted Vansittart’s view that ‘this danger must be countered, not by collaboration with Germany but by collaboration with Russia’. The major concluded that it was ‘urgently desirable to take some further step to strengthen our position at Moscow and keep the Soviet Government in the Franco-British orbit’.<sup>52</sup>

These issues became wrapped up in a discussion of British trade policy towards Soviet Russia. Earlier in 1935, various schemes had been floated in which Britain would extend a guaranteed loan to Moscow at a higher rate of interest than the prevailing one, the difference in rates being used to generate money to pay off the Russian debts.<sup>53</sup> The Treasury did not object in principle, but saw political peril. As Neville Chamberlain

<sup>52</sup> Maj. Hayes (MI2, WO) to Collier, 3 Dec 1935, FO 371/19450/N6255/7/38, spawned the discussion; Collier’s minute (19 Dec).

<sup>53</sup> Capt. Victor Cazalet, MP, to Oliphant, 9 Apr 1935, T 160/749/F14202/1, Leith-Ross to Sir Horace Wilson (chief industrial adviser to the government) and Runciman (president, B of T), 9 May 1935, T 160/791/F7438/10; Waley to Collier, 2 Jul 1935, Ashton-Gwatkin’s note, 4 Jul 1935, sent to Leith-Ross, and Waley to Fergusson, 6 Jul 1935, all T 160/749/F14202/1. Cf. the interpretation in Michael Jabara Carley, ‘“A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances”: The Anglo-Soviet *Rapprochement*, 1934–1936’, *CEH*, 5, 1 (1996), 53–5.



noted, while 'he was a realist & had no prejudices' against such an arrangement, 'he was also a realist in the sense that he wasn't going to have any serious Party difficulties over it'.<sup>54</sup> And, officials at the Treasury were aware that 'Lord Beaverbrook would no doubt feel that if we wanted to develop any country with guaranteed loans we had better chose our Colonial Empire rather than Communist Russia, and a good many people would sympathise with his views'.<sup>55</sup>

On 17 October, the matter came to a head. The Board of Trade proposed that, instead of offering the Soviets a loan, as the Foreign Office and Moscow preferred, export credits should be extended.<sup>56</sup> Export credits would not require the legislation that a guaranteed loan would (thus avoiding anti-Soviet parliamentary pressure), it was 'very uncertain' that the Soviets would tie a debt settlement to a loan, and export credits reduced the period of risk of Soviet default to five years from a loan's fifteen to twenty years.<sup>57</sup> But export credits would also mean that there was little likelihood that any of the Russian debts would ever be settled. This, combined with the fact that the loan had been 'vigorously espoused in the Foreign Office', tipped Chamberlain towards the need for consultation.

A meeting was made more urgent due to a query from a British firm asking what attitude the government would take towards an Anglo-French consortium constructing railway improvements in Soviet Russia. Collier and Ashton-Gwatkin met with the Board of Trade to discuss the matter. The foreign-policy ramifications were evident, as any delay might lead the Soviets to 'turn elsewhere – to the Americans for example, or even to the Germans'.<sup>58</sup> They also decided that this needed to be discussed by Chamberlain, Hoare and Runciman.<sup>59</sup> However, with a general election just three weeks away, such talks were delayed.

In the interim, Maisky talked to Ashton-Gwatkin.<sup>60</sup> Four days after the election, on 18 November, Hoare and Chamberlain met again.<sup>61</sup> On that same day, Maisky told Vansittart that a British loan would serve to lessen Soviet suspicions that the recent Franco-German talks were

<sup>54</sup> N. Chamberlain's views in Leith-Ross to Waley, personal, 8 Jul 1935, T 160/749/F14202/1.

<sup>55</sup> Waley to Phillips and Fergusson, 30 Jul 1935, T 160/749/F14202/1.

<sup>56</sup> J. R. C. Helmore (B of T) to Fergusson, secret, 17 Oct 1935, T 160/791/F7438/10.

<sup>57</sup> Untitled memo by Waley, 18 Oct 1935, minutes, Hopkins (18 Oct) and N. Chamberlain (18 Oct), all T 160/791/F7438/10.

<sup>58</sup> Stevenson (managing director, Holland and Hannen and Cubbitts Limited) to FO, 23 Oct 1935, FO 371/19452/N5543/17/38, Collier's minute (25 Oct).

<sup>59</sup> The Treasury was sceptical about the railway project: Waley to Rowe Dutton, 8 Nov 1935, memo (19 Nov 1935), H. Wilson Smith, both T 160/791/F7438/10.

<sup>60</sup> Memo, Ashton-Gwatkin, 9 Nov 1935, FO 371/19452/N5808/17/38.

<sup>61</sup> Memo, Hoare, 18 Nov 1935, FO 371/19452/N5949/17/38.



aimed at giving Berlin 'a free hand in Europe'. Maisky's comments raised the ire of Eden, still only minister for League of Nations affairs. Adumbrating the attitude that he would take towards Soviet Russia when he became foreign secretary, Eden announced that, if Soviet Russia had not 'interfered so much & so consistently' in France's internal affairs, perhaps Laval would not be so irate and the possibility of a *rapprochement* with Berlin would not even be bruited. 'M. Maisky will get *no* sympathy from me', Eden declared, 'I am through with the Muscovites of this hue.'<sup>62</sup> Eden was also suspicious that the loan's 'proceeds' would be used to pay for 'communist propaganda, here & elsewhere'.<sup>63</sup> But, after coaxing by the Northern Department, Eden was 'converted' to approving the loan.

On 28 November, Hoare, Chamberlain and Runciman met.<sup>64</sup> Hoare contended that the loan was needed for 'keeping Russia out of the German orbit', but only Chamberlain accepted the argument.<sup>65</sup> Runciman continued to prefer granting extended credit. He agreed, however, to re-examine the loan if the Soviets would pay a high rate of interest. Desultory discussions were held.<sup>66</sup> The political explosion caused by the Hoare-Laval plan delayed any decision. Vansittart was impatient to determine British policy towards Soviet Russia: 'We shall – as in other matters', the PUS minuted on 21 December, 'miss a very large boat if we cannot make up our minds even now'.<sup>67</sup> He was doomed to frustration. On 24 December, Runciman insisted that only credits, not a loan, could be given to the Soviets.<sup>68</sup> In the charged political atmosphere, a second row over foreign policy was unthinkable. This was enough for Chamberlain. He supported Runciman's views: 'The more I think of the Loan proposal the less I like it.'<sup>69</sup> This was a political matter for the Cabinet, and would take time. Though Vansittart and Eden were both annoyed and concerned that Maisky might turn elsewhere, they found solace in

<sup>62</sup> Vansittart's memo, 18 Nov 1935, FO 371/19452/N5966/17/38, Eden's minute (20 Nov).

<sup>63</sup> His minute (21 Nov) on Remnant to Collier, 25 Oct 1935, FO 371/19448/N5566/1/38, minutes.

<sup>64</sup> Hoare's memo, 28 Nov 1935, FO 371/19452/N6222/17/38; Collier's minutes (30 Nov and 2 Dec).

<sup>65</sup> The reasons in untitled memo by Waley, minute by Phillips, both 26 Nov 1935, T 160/749/F14202/2.

<sup>66</sup> Waley to Hopkins, note, 5 Dec 1935; Collier to Waley, very secret, 7 Dec 1935, both T 160/749/F14202/2.

<sup>67</sup> Collier's minute, 12 Dec 1935, FO 371/19452/N6471/17/38; Waley to FO, 13 Dec 1935, FO 371/19452/N6484/17/38, Vansittart's minute (21 Dec); for the political effect, see Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Buchan, 15 Jan 1936, Buchan Papers, Box 7.

<sup>68</sup> Brown (B of T) to Vansittart, 24 Dec 1935, FO 371/19452/N6698/17/38, minutes (included is Maisky to Eden, 23 Dec 1935).

<sup>69</sup> Chamberlain's minute (25 Dec) on Waley to Rowan, 24 Dec 1935, T 160/749/F14202/2.

the Soviet ambassador's statement that a 'stable and lasting peace system' required 'true collaboration' between their countries.<sup>70</sup> But Vansittart also attempted to push matters. He prodded the Board of Trade, noting that Maisky 'is beginning to wonder whether we really intend to do anything at all to improve Anglo-Soviet trade, or Anglo-Soviet relations generally'.<sup>71</sup>

In the new year, the entire issue was unresolved. Maisky returned to the charge. On 6 January, the ambassador told both Eden and Collier that Anglo-Soviet friendship was essential for European peace and urged the need to grant the Anglo-Soviet loan to underline this solidarity. Eden was non-committal, but emphasized that Soviet Russia must 'rigorously abstain' from interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries. Vansittart noted that Maisky was 'most anxious' that there would be no further delay in the loan discussions in order 'to counter all the premature talk of an agreement with Germany, to which M. Laval has given so much currency. There is also a lot of loose talk and looser thinking on the subject *here* – of which he [Laval] is well aware'.<sup>72</sup>

These issues were also tied to the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact.<sup>73</sup> Considerations of this prompted discussion about how 'the reaction of ratification' would affect British interests. Wigram pointed out that London had always believed that the pact had been concluded by Paris in order to block any possible Russo-German *rapprochement* – 'also one of the reasons for which a Russian loan from this country is advocated'. He also pointed out that ratification might lead to Germany's taking 'some foolish initiative'. Further, it could 'scarcely assist any schemes we may have in mind for the establishment of more cordial relations between France, Germany and ourselves'. The head of the Central Department made clear just how significant the entire matter was for Britain:

<sup>70</sup> For other possible loans, see Michael Jabara Carley, 'Five Kopecks for Five Kopecks: Franco-Soviet Trade Negotiations, 1928–1939', *CMRS*, 33, 1 (1992), 23–58; Geoffrey Roberts, 'A Soviet Bid for Coexistence with Nazi Germany, 1935–1937: The Kandelaki Affair', *IHR*, 16, 3 (1994), 466–90.

<sup>71</sup> Waley to FO, 13 Dec 1935, FO 371/19452/N6484/17/38, Vansittart's minute (21 Dec).

<sup>72</sup> Eden's memo, 7 Jan 1936, FO 371/20338/N120/20/38, minutes, Collier (8 Jan), Vansittart (7 Jan); Collier's memo, 6 Jan 1936, FO 371/20338/N125/20/38; cf. Carley, '"A Fearful Concatenation"', 59–62. See also Nicholas Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations 1934–1936* (New York, 1984), 226–34.

<sup>73</sup> This and the following paragraph based on Phipps to Eden, disps 1344 and 1359, 16 and 19 Dec 1935, both Phipps Papers, PHPP 1/15; 'Comments on Berlin Telegrams Nos. 343, 344, 345 and 298 Saving', Wigram, 16 Dec 1935, FO 371/18852/C8329/55/18; Phipps to FO, 30 Dec 1935, FO 371/19855/C1/1/17; Clerk to FO, tel 2, 3 Jan 1936, FO 371/19855/C62/1/17, minutes, Wigram (6 Jan), Collier (7 Jan), Sargent (8 Jan), Vansittart (9 Jan) and Stanhope (15 Jan).

The contest between these two schools of opinion in France raises a very important issue. One favours the stabilization of the European situation by [an] understanding with Germany – the other by tightening the bonds with Russia. Ratification of the Franco-Russian treaty will in fact mean that France has chosen the second course.

He concluded with a question: 'What course do we favour?'

Collier and Sargent were on opposite sides. The former argued that 'it is most important for us and for France to cultivate good relations with the Soviet Government in view both of the German menace in Europe and of the Japanese menace in the Far East'. He did not 'believe that it is either possible or desirable . . . to attempt to reverse our present policy by coming to an understanding with Germany at the expense of Russia'. Sargent felt otherwise. He contended that ratification might pre-empt any British decision 'as to how Germany's ambitions are in future to be controlled'. If the Franco-Soviet Pact came into effect, it 'would make it still more difficult than it already is for us to reach any sort of settlement with Germany', particularly if Hitler viewed ratification as 'proof that France has reverted to the so-called policy of encirclement'. Vansittart merely argued that the French would likely ratify no matter what Britain advised.

There were clear divisions in the Foreign Office about how Soviet Russia factored into the British strategic foreign policy equation. They surfaced again in the often-hostile loan debate. On 9 January, Collier and Ashton-Gwatkin advocated granting the loan.<sup>74</sup> Eden approved their views, but with reservations. He felt that their argument was 'just' sufficient, but reiterated his concern that the money would finance 'communist propaganda in the Empire'.<sup>75</sup> Sargent remained opposed. He argued that a guaranteed loan to Soviet Russia 'will appear to public opinion throughout Europe as a highly significant act implying an unusual and close political co-operation between the two governments'. With final ratification of the Franco-Soviet Treaty continuing apace, Hitler would regard a loan 'as the contribution of His Majesty's Government to the French encirclement policy'. Sargent was seconded by one of the parliamentary undersecretaries, Lord Stanhope. For the latter, the key was the '*political*' question: 'what is our policy? Is it to improve our relations with Russia *or* with Germany & Japan?' He echoed Sargent's

<sup>74</sup> This and the following two paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on minutes and marginalia, untitled memo, Collier and Ashton-Gwatkin, nd (but 9 Jan 1936), FO 371/20338/N479/20/38.

<sup>75</sup> A bugbear for Eden: Eden to FO, tel 7, 21 Jan 1936, Eden Papers, FO 954/24.

point about the possible German cry of encirclement, and added that 'I cannot say that I look with much enthusiasm on being friends with Russia or Germany or Japan – I mistrust them all, but I mistrust Russia most of the three.'

Vansittart, who supported Collier, deflected some of this criticism. He noted that the Germans were attempting to seize the initiative themselves by offering a loan to Soviet Russia. But Eden riposted that Germany was not able to do this, and found 'much force' in Sargent's arguments. The foreign secretary's remarks reflected his antipathy to Soviet Russia: 'I want good relations with the bear', he noted, '[but] I don't want to hug him too close. I don't trust him, & am sure there is hatred in his heart for all we stand for. So the loan only if it is worth *our* while.' His dislike was shared by a second parliamentary undersecretary, Lord Cranborne. He argued that the Soviets would 'remain unalterably malignant to the British Empire, and [would] intrigue against us whenever and wherever they can'. The loan would be resented by Germany, and would make it more difficult to coax it 'back into the comity of nations'.

Vansittart contested these assertions. He rejected the idea that the policy alternatives were 'pro-this or anti-that'. The Northern Department was not 'pro-Russian' nor was the Central Department 'pro-German'. For the PUS, the 'real point' was as follows:

Can Germany be 'brought back into the comity of nations'? The answer is only at a price. Next question. Are we prepared to pay? If we are, we certainly ought to try and might well succeed. If we can't we probably should not try, because failure will be making the worst of both worlds. And even if we try and fail . . . the ultimate question will remain: which constitutes the most immediate danger? So that until we know the answer to the possibility of bringing Germany back, we ought to be careful to discourage no one who is in the same boat. There are many of them, and one happens for the present to be Russia.

The argument did not end there. On 17 January, Sargent argued the contrary position.<sup>76</sup> He noted that 'this whole question of Anglo-German and Anglo-Russian relations was at present *sub judice*' and could not yet be answered. His minute, however, advocated a very different line of policy:

the danger of a German-Russian rapprochement can only be successfully countered by a system of collaboration with *both* Germany and Russia, and more particularly with Germany, inasmuch as the initiative for such a rapprochement lies with Germany and not with Russia. Whatever treaties, loans, and other

<sup>76</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is based on his minute (17 Jan 1936) on Chilston to Collier, 10 Dec 1935, FO 371/19460/N6642/75/38.

favours we and the French may give to the Soviet Government, so great is the moral and physical influence of Germany in Eastern Europe that I have little doubt that they would not weigh for a moment with Litvinov if Hitler were to offer him a German alliance . . . On the other hand, the thing which is most likely to decide Hitler to swallow his principles and to reverse his anti-Russian policy is the conviction that Great Britain and France are determined on a policy of ostracising Germany and surrounding her with a circle of enemies. Probably there is nothing we can do to convince him to the contrary, and it is possible that he does not wish to be so convinced. But I still feel – and I think you agree with me – that we ought at any rate to make the effort, if only to test Hitler's intentions and sincerity, before putting all our eggs in the Russian basket.

Vansittart's response noted that little could be done until the Cabinet decided on a policy. But he stated that a Russo-German *rapprochement* was likely only in the future and then only 'if we mismanage the situation'. He did not favour any agreement with Germany: 'None of us can be sure yet that any settlement worth the name is attainable with Germany.' As a result, 'until we are, we must be careful not to alienate a country [that is, Soviet Russia] with whom we are collaborating (at Geneva) in favour of one with whom we have not got even that link'.<sup>77</sup>

A week later, Collier began a further battle in this war to determine the 'agreed' view of the situation. He argued that the Germans could not assert that any possible British loan to Soviet Russia was anything different from their own offer to Moscow. The political implications were straightforward: Britain would not 'connive' at any attack by Germany on Soviet Russia, and, if the Germans resented this, it was due to the inherently aggressive nature of Nazi foreign policy. As to the argument that negotiations with Germany would proceed more favourably if the Soviet loan were not given, Collier averred that 'if such an understanding [with Germany] is to have any value it seems essential that it should not be negotiated under a threat of blackmail'. Opposition was swift. Sargent was unconvinced that 'we need or ought to run the risk of the political repercussions, both at home and abroad' of providing the loan. He suggested that credits, as the Germans were offering the Soviets, were a better alternative to the loan.<sup>78</sup>

Events intruded. On 22 January, Berlin announced the granting of German credits to Soviet Russia, just as Collier had long predicted. Sargent rejected that this tipped the scales in favour of a British loan, but Vansittart now argued that something had to be done, as 'it looks as if we either have lost, or were going to lose, our chance'. Eden agreed.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Vansittart's minute (17 Jan) on *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Collier's memo, 23 Jan 1936, FO 371/20338/N425/20/38, minutes.

<sup>79</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 15, 22 Jan 1936, FO 371/20346/N400/187/38, minutes.

The final nail in Sargent's coffin came on 28 January, when Phipps sent an account of the German offer. This was enough for Vansittart. Now matters had to be resolved on the basis of 'our own interests and not a will o' the wisp'. He suggested that Eden take the entire matter to Cabinet on the basis of Collier's memorandum.<sup>80</sup> This did not occur. Instead, it was decided to hold a fuller discussion of British policy in Europe.<sup>81</sup> This decision was likely spawned by considerations of the potential impact of the Franco-Soviet Agreement. There was no doubt what the Soviets wished it to mean. On 22 January, Litvinov told Eden that the only way to deter Germany was for all other nations to oppose it, causing Sargent to note (to Collier's irritation) that 'M. Litvinoff advocates the policy of encirclement pure and simple.'<sup>82</sup> Five days later, the French premier, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, told Eden of his desire to improve both Franco-German and Anglo-French relations.<sup>83</sup> A key issue was ratification of the Franco-Soviet Agreement, which Flandin was rushing through because, in its non-ratified form, it produced the worst of both worlds: the irritation of Germany without the commitment of Moscow to France.

Sargent still opposed ratification. He believed that it 'may have such far-reaching effects on our own policy and our own situation' that it should be delayed 'until the European situation is somewhat clearer'. A premature ratification might 'strain' Franco-German relations to such an extent that 'it may be impossible for us even to initiate a policy of rapprochement with Germany in collaboration with France . . . This road will have been closed before we have even begun to walk down it, and instead the first step will have been taken in the direction of encirclement, without any guarantee that such encirclement can be made effective.' And, in fact, a full-blown Franco-Soviet arrangement might lead 'to the conclusion of a German-Japanese Pact as [a] counterweight'.<sup>84</sup> Instead, Sargent preferred to hold the threat of ratification '*in terrorem*

<sup>80</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 20, 28 Jan 1936, FO 371/20346/N515/187/18, minutes; memo, Perowne, 31 Jan 1936, FO 371/20339/N663/20/38.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Crozier, 'Prelude to Munich: British Foreign Policy and Germany, 1935-1938', *ESR*, 6 (1976), 359-62.

<sup>82</sup> Edmond (consul, Geneva) to FO, tel 8 LN, 22 Jan 1936, FO 371/18979/C452/92/62, minutes, Sargent (23 Jan), Collier (29 Jan); Eden to Chilston, disp 56, 30 Jan 1936, FO 371/19884/C692/4/18, Sargent's minutes (8 Feb).

<sup>83</sup> The remainder of this and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on Eden to Clerk, disp 143, 27 Jan 1936, FO 371/19879/C573/92/62, minutes, Sargent, Vansittart and Eden (1 Feb, 1 Feb and 3 Feb).

<sup>84</sup> See also Phipps to Berlin, disp 49, 10 Jan 1936, FO 371/20285/F303/303/23, noting the growing warmth between the German and Japanese fighting services; cf. Phipps to FO, tel 13 saving, 20 Jan 1936, FO 371/20285/F365/23.

over Germany's head' as a bargaining tool. For his part, Vansittart contended (in a view likely derived from his bitter experience over Abyssinia) that Britain should not offer any advice to Flandin, since it 'would at once leak out' and 'produce a storm'. Both the PUS and Eden preferred that the two countries should instead reconsider the idea of a 'Mediterranean Locarno'.

Policy was threshed out on 3 February.<sup>85</sup> The discussion centred around a paper produced by Vansittart. The PUS summarized many of the points he had been making for the past two years. He observed that the 'Versailles system has broken down', and that some alternative means needed to be found to restabilize Europe. With respect to Germany, he saw three alternatives. First, the British could 'wait on events'; second, a policy of 'encirclement' might be followed; or, finally, trust could be put in 'the propaganda value of the League'. He rejected all three, and advocated that the British 'would be well advised to resume the exploration of their former policy of coming to terms with Germany, provided always that this course proves possible, honourable and safe'. Soviet Russia was an important factor in Vansittart's calculations. A particular concern was the possibility of a Russo-German *rapprochement*, which the Franco-Soviet Treaty had been designed to prevent. Only Hitler's 'personal hatred' of Bolshevism stood in the way of such an occurrence, and the PUS argued that this was not necessarily eternal. What circumstances were most likely to lead Hitler to put his prejudices aside? 'He would be most likely to do so', Vansittart asserted, 'in the event of his convincing himself that he was being threatened by encirclement.' 'He might equally do so,' the PUS went on, 'if a policy of too prolonged drift on the part of Britain and France led him to conclude that he could hope for nothing from either of them.' He concluded that, if 'this is correct, an Anglo-French settlement with Germany would be a more effective guarantee against the dangers of Russo-German co-operation than the present Franco-Russian Treaty standing by itself'.

Such an argument led directly to the 'urgent question' of the possible loan for Soviet Russia. The advocates of improved Anglo-German relations favoured giving credits, since a loan would be interpreted as 'throwing in our lot with France and Russia'. What should be done?

<sup>85</sup> This and the following two paragraphs are based on 'Note of a Meeting held in the Secretary of State's room at the Foreign Office on February 3rd, 1936, to discuss Sir R. Vansittart's memo on Britain, France and Germany', ns, 3 Feb 1936, FO 371/19885/C979/4/18; Vansittart's memo forms part of 'Germany', CP 42(36), secret, Eden, 11 Feb 1936, Cab 24/260.

Surely, the answer . . . is that we should first ask ourselves whether we intend to bring Germany back into the comity of nations at a price to which neither Russia nor anyone else can legitimately object, that is by the restitution of the German colonies. If the answer is 'Yes', the answer should clearly be credits. If the answer is 'No', there is no reason to boggle at a loan, for there will anyhow be no prospect of settling with Germany, and we may then take whichever course is more compatible with our interests.

While Vansittart was not insistent on using colonies as a means of finding common ground with the Germans, he was adamant that there would be a price to pay for any improvement in Anglo-German relations.

At the meeting, the 'general feeling' was that negotiations with Germany were 'desirable'. Further, such negotiations should be pursued in tandem with 'simultaneous' parallel discussions with the French. This turned the gathering towards a consideration of the loan versus credits issue. All Sargent's fears were again raised. Hitler might 'interpret this [the granting of a loan], should it follow on the ratification of the Franco-Russian Treaty, as a definite move against Germany by Great Britain and France, and . . . he might reply with the reoccupation of the Rhineland demilitarised zone or even with the conclusion of an alliance with Japan'. Eden made two points. First, echoing earlier concerns, the foreign secretary doubted that 'the Cabinet would accept the loan'; second, he felt that the loan 'was almost certainly valued by Russia partly because of its political complexion and . . . that for the time being at any rate it must be decided to go ahead with credits and then see what happened as regards the negotiations with Germany'. The die was cast.

The Soviet loan died in the Cabinet on 12 February. While Eden put forward the Foreign Office's views concerning the advantages of a loan, he accepted the Board of Trade's proposal for credits, for the reasons given above.<sup>86</sup> The Cabinet approved the idea of granting credits to Soviet Russia. The matter was resolved.<sup>87</sup> A loan to Soviet Russia was not going to be permitted to stand in the way of a British effort to reach a comprehensive settlement in Europe. Why was this decision taken? There were several contributing reasons. First, there were political and ideological obstacles. A guaranteed loan required legislation, and there was a vociferous lobby in the House of Commons that would have insisted that any loan must be linked to a repayment of Russian debts,

<sup>86</sup> Memo, H. Wilson Smith (Treasury) to Waley, 7 Feb 1936, T 160/683/F14676/1, for the preliminaries; the FO's views are in 'Export Credits for Russian Orders', CP 32 (36), secret, Eden, 8 Feb 1936; the B of T's position is in 'Export Credits for Russian Orders', CP 31(36), Runciman, both Cab 24/259. Minutes, Cabinet 6(36), 12 Feb 1936, Cab 23/83.

<sup>87</sup> Subsequent action, Nixon (ECGD) to Waley, 13 Feb 1936, T 160/683/F14676/1.



a nexus that the Soviets refused to acknowledge publicly, although their attitude towards paying a higher interest rate suggested that they would turn a blind eye to any British move to use some of the interest to pay the debts. There was also a related lobby that objected to any treating with Soviet Russia whatsoever (as the Metro-Vickers crisis had made clear just two years earlier).<sup>88</sup> In the Cabinet, there were some, like Hailsham, who shared this view. Second, there was no one among the ministers to champion the Soviet cause. Chamberlain had made it clear that a Soviet loan was not worth the political aggravation of trying to achieve it. On the other hand, there were strong advocates, like Runciman, of the alternative policy of granting credits. This left Eden. The foreign secretary was very much the new boy, and his position was not strong enough to afford the political difficulties of pushing through a Soviet loan.<sup>89</sup> Further, he was suspicious that the Soviets were not particularly interested in working within the context of the League's Covenant, and Eden's reputation was as a champion of collective security.<sup>90</sup>

Nor was there any consensus among the officials at the Foreign Office. Collier and Sargent had opposing views, and they continued to snipe at each other. Vansittart's position was more complex. On some occasions he occupied a middle ground between Collier and Sargent. And, while in late January he had seemed to be in favour of the loan, at the vital meeting in February he threw his support behind a more comprehensive settlement. What prompted this change is speculative, but it seems likely that it resulted from several things. First, Vansittart had a wide view of foreign affairs, and the more comprehensive approach offered the possibility to stabilize Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of the Stresa front.<sup>91</sup> Second, after December, Vansittart needed to mend his own fences, since much of the blame for the Hoare-Laval fiasco had fallen on his shoulders, and he could not afford to be seen to disagree with Eden's views.<sup>92</sup> Further, Vansittart's anti-Germanism was notorious, and he needed to demonstrate that he could take a broader view in order to secure his position. This was evident to many. 'There has been a tendency to "head-hunt" over Sam Hoare's escapade in Paris', Hankey wrote on 2 January, 'and Van's name has been mentioned or hinted at – even in Parliamentary debate I think.'<sup>93</sup> This, combined with the fact

<sup>88</sup> David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 2000), 46–50.

<sup>89</sup> A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931–1938* (New York, 1986), 167.

<sup>90</sup> Eden's differences with the Soviets can be seen in his conversation with Maisky, 11 Feb 1936, FO 371/19885/C965/4/18, Wigram's caustic minute (18 Feb).

<sup>91</sup> Roi, 'From the Stresa Front', 82–5.

<sup>92</sup> Eden to Runciman, 13 Dec 1935, Runciman Papers, WR 275.

<sup>93</sup> Hankey to Phipps, 2 Jan 1936, Phipps Papers, PHPP 3/3.

that Eden had just invited Alexander Cadogan, who had worked closely with Eden at Geneva, back from China (where he was ambassador) to become joint deputy undersecretary at the Foreign Office, must have made the PUS concerned about maintaining his influence in Whitehall.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, the Soviet loan was no-man's child. By the middle of February 1936, the makers of British strategic foreign policy had decided that circumstances were such that Britain's interests were not best served by moving towards Soviet Russia. Only events would show whether this decision was correct or would require further analysis. But one thing was certain: the conundrums of the 'deterrence' period had not yet been resolved.

<sup>94</sup> Cadogan's diary entry, 4 Feb 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4.

## 5 Soviet Russian assertiveness: February 1936–July 1937

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The decision not to offer Soviet Russia a loan (and, by extension, not to prepare the way for a possible political arrangement between the two states) did not end the choices facing those who made British policy. The next year and a half was full of events that made determining the direction of British policy even more difficult. British strategic foreign policy continued in its 'deterrence' phase, with no new consensus about its proper direction emerging. The German remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936 and the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Treaty on 2 May undermined Eden's efforts to find a comprehensive settlement based on an Anglo-French-German understanding. Italy annexed Abyssinia, again revealing the League's impotence. On 18 July 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out, with all its ideological, political and strategic complications. In the Far East, a series of incidents kept Anglo-Japanese relations on edge, while, on 25 November, the signing of the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact linked two of Britain's potential foes together. In May and June 1937, the Purges in the Red Army and the resulting questioning of Soviet Russia's strategic value threatened to disrupt the precarious balance of power. Finally, on 7 July 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge incident initiated fully fledged hostilities between Japan and China, which threatened British interests in China. However, until the advent of the Purges, Soviet Russian military strength increased, and Moscow continued to pursue a policy of deterrence towards both Germany and Japan. Soviet military strength deterred Japan and Germany, but Soviet foreign policy often had results that were contrary to British interests. The tension between the two was the essence of the Soviet impact on British strategic defence policy.

At the beginning of 1936, while the focus was on the Anglo-Soviet loan discussions and Franco-Soviet relations, the Far East also touched on British thinking about Soviet Russia. Opinion at the Foreign Office held that 'uneasiness between Japan & Russia & a permanent state of

tension is the ideal from our point of view'.<sup>1</sup> Such tension was felt likely to persist.<sup>2</sup> However, there were also disquieting reports about possible closer relations between Germany and Japan.<sup>3</sup> Such a *rapprochement* would be directed against Soviet Russia, and raised the spectre of a two-front war for the latter.<sup>4</sup> The situations in Europe and the Far East were tied together by considerations of defence. In November 1935, the DRC issued its third report, which argued that it was 'a cardinal requirement' that diplomacy should prevent Britain's being confronted 'simultaneously' with Japanese aggression in the East, German aggression in the West and, referring to the complication caused by Italy's adventure in Abyssinia, aggression from 'any Power on the main line of communication between the two'.<sup>5</sup> This struck a responsive chord at the War Office, where concerns about the defence of Hong Kong had underlined the shortages of troops available for the Far East.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of January 1936, Colonel Hastings Ismay, the head of MI2, initiated a re-examination of British policy in the Far East. Ismay believed that the Japanese army was bogged down in North China and that Soviet Russia was Japan's 'main enemy'. Japan needed to find friends. He contended that 'only Anglo-Japanese friendship seems likely to deter Japan from entering into closer relations with Germany'. This would be attractive for London, since 'our interests in the Far East, at any rate north of Singapore, are at the mercy of the Japanese'.<sup>7</sup> Ismay's views found wide acceptance at the War Office, and a paper advocating such a policy was submitted to the Cabinet.<sup>8</sup> Orde demolished the argument.<sup>9</sup> He argued that Japan was determined to be dominant in

<sup>1</sup> Minute (9 Jan), Gascoigne (FED), on Clive to FO, tel 6, 8 Jan 1936, FO 371/20279/F149/89/23.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes, FO 371/20279/F89/89/23; Clive to FO, disp 30, 20 Jan 1936, FO 371/20286/F954/539/23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Phipps to FO, disp 49, 10 Jan 1936, FO 371/20285/F303/303/23; 'Note on German-Japanese Relations', secret, Lawford, 24 Jan 1936, FO 371/20285/F674/303/23, minutes.

<sup>4</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 13, 20 Jan 1936, FO 371/20285/F365/303/23, minutes.

<sup>5</sup> 'Defence Requirements Sub-Committee. Third Report', Hankey, Chatfield, Ellington, Fisher, Montgomery-Massingberd and Vansittart, 21 Nov 1935, Cab 16/112.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes, 271st meeting CID, 14 Oct 1935, Cab 2/6; 'Strategical Situation in the Far East with particular reference to Hong Kong', CID 410-C, Chatfield, Montgomery-Massingberd and Ellington, 10 Oct 1935, Cab 5/8.

<sup>7</sup> Minute, Ismay (MI2), 1 Jan 1936, WO 106/5509, referring to Clive to FO, tel 350, 27 Dec 1935, FO 371/19357/F8065/376/23.

<sup>8</sup> 'The Importance of Anglo-Japanese Friendship – Memorandum by Mr Duff Cooper (Secretary of State for War) covering a memorandum prepared by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff', CP 12(36), 17 Jan 1936, Cab 24/259. WO 106/5509 shows that the author was Brevet Lt-Col G. E. Grimsdale of MI2(c).

<sup>9</sup> The remainder of this and the following two paragraphs are based on his untitled memo, 22 Jan 1936, FO 371/20279/F701/89/23; minutes.

China and that, to achieve this, Tokyo would have 'to remove the ultimate check . . . which Russia's strategical position and strength afford'. Japan thus wanted British friendship only in order to 'cover her rear' while dealing with Soviet Russia. What would be the return for Britain? At most Japan might respect Britain's interests in China. This was not worth the diplomatic repercussions. If Britain improved relations with Japan, China would believe that Britain had connived at its 'spoliation', the United States 'would look on us as selfish opportunists' and 'League circles . . . would regard us in the same light and as traitors to the cause of international morality'.

Most of all, Orde noted, such an action would be fatal to Anglo-Soviet relations. An Anglo-Japanese agreement would be a 'bombshell' in Moscow. He tied together European and Far Eastern concerns:

we must weigh the consequences very carefully before we do anything to alienate the Soviet Government and weaken her as a counter-poise either against Japan in the Far East, or perhaps still more important, against Germany in Europe. While uneasy relations between Japan and Russia are to our advantage as a check on Japanese aggression, it would not be to our advantage to do anything to encourage hostilities between them, and this could hardly fail to be the result of making Japan feel that she had made the initial step to securing her rear.

Without an understanding with Britain, Japan was unlikely to attack Soviet Russia until Tokyo was stronger. If Soviet Russia were to get more powerful in the interim, Tokyo would then wait 'until Germany is ready to strike at her end'. Orde suggested that this was why the German ambassador at Tokyo favoured an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*.

As to the rumoured German-Japanese agreement, an Anglo-Japanese settlement would not deter it. Japan would continue to seek any and all aid for its 'possible struggle with Russia'. From a British perspective, Japanese friendship was too expensive: 'We could not agree to naval parity, nor can we agree to offend China, Russia, the United States and League opinion.' Vansittart agreed. He noted on 25 January that '[p]erhaps the situation can be summed up still more tersely. Germany wants to attack Russia. Japan wants to attack Russia and China, when Germany is ready. So long as these wholly immoral and wholly unleaguely ambitions are entertained, it is of no use to expect any permanent or real settlement with either . . . These remarks apply equally to Germany and Japan.' The solution was not diplomacy, but to 'repair our strength'.

At the Cabinet on 29 January, the War Office failed to make its case. While the First Lord of the Admiralty, Bolton Eyres Monsell, agreed that the 'real danger' for Britain was a German-Japanese agreement, Eden

pointed out that it was 'easier to desire' good Anglo-Japanese relations than to bring them about. It was noted that Leith-Ross was at present trying to improve the general situation in the Far East, and the Cabinet concluded – in what was a rebuff to the War Office – that 'better opportunities' than a Cabinet discussion should be found to resolve the difference of opinion between the Foreign and War Offices.<sup>10</sup> The latter department was annoyed and disappointed by the Cabinet's decision. However, Ismay noted that there was 'clearly nothing to be done but wait and see'. He pointed out that there was a 'gulf . . . apparently unalterably – between the Foreign Office and ourselves'. The Foreign Office had found another opponent for its Far Eastern policy.<sup>11</sup>

There remained issues within that office itself. Collier's quarrels with Orme Sargent and the Central Department did not end with the loan debate. In early February, during a debate about the strength of the Soviet armed forces, Collier and the Far Eastern Department combined against the Central Department's trumpeting of the need not to 'encircle' Germany.<sup>12</sup> Another quarrel surfaced on 11 February when Maisky suggested a visit to Soviet Russia by either Duff Cooper, the secretary of state for war, or by a parliamentary delegation.<sup>13</sup> When Collier proposed writing to Chilston about such a visit, Sargent objected. Until British policy in Europe had been finalized (a Cabinet committee had been struck on 12 February at Eden's behest to discuss whether a policy of accommodation with Germany could be initiated),<sup>14</sup> Sargent believed that nothing should be done to antagonize the Germans. A visit by Duff Cooper would be seen 'as concrete evidence of an Anglo-Russian rapprochement to the exclusion of an Anglo-German one'. Sargent argued that Soviet foreign policy was implacably hostile to Britain and only 'fear of Germany drives them to seek an ally among the mammon of capitalism'. Collier's letter was sent, but the differences of opinion were plain.

They surfaced again in mid-February. Chilston wrote from Moscow about Soviet–German relations. He asserted that the Soviets had little desire to improve relations with Berlin, except at an economic level, so

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, Cabinet 3(36), 29 Jan 1936, Cab 23/83.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes and correspondence, WO 106/5509.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes on Maj. C. R. Hayes (MI2, WO) to Collier, 6 Feb 1936, FO 371/20348/N751/287/38; Keith Neilson, "Pursued by a Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922–1939', *CJH*, 28, 2 (1993), 210–12.

<sup>13</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on memo by Collier of discussions with Maisky by both Eden and himself, 11 Feb 1936, minutes, FO 371/20339/N833/20/38.

<sup>14</sup> A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931–1938* (New York, 1986), 170–3; minutes, Cabinet 6(36), 12 Feb 1936, Cab 23/83.

long as collective security seemed to work. Collier interpreted this to mean 'that the assumption sometimes made in this office . . . [by Sargent] that the Soviet Government are so anxious for an understanding with the Germans that we cannot hope to keep them in the anti-German front if Herr Hitler chose to reverse his present policy' was wrong. Collier contended that 'if we fail them [the Soviets] they will turn to the Germans, *but not otherwise*'. Sargent was biting: he was 'delighted' that the 'bogey of a German-Russian entente with which we and the French are being continually frightened' was false. But he completely rejected Collier's contention 'that only by a policy of collaboration with the Soviets can we be sure of warding off the menace of a Soviet-German rapprochement, and that if we fail them (whatever that may mean) they will turn to the Germans'.<sup>15</sup>

During the next few weeks, as the Cabinet committee deliberated over finding an accommodation with Germany, bickering continued. However, while Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland on 7 March undermined Sargent's arguments, it did not lead to an effort to improve relations with Moscow. At the end of February, Chilston stated that, were Duff Cooper to go to Soviet Russia, the latter should not attend the May Day parade, as this would be read as confirming Anglo-Soviet military co-operation against Germany. Writing on 7 March, Collier contended that the day's events had made such niceties superfluous. He noted that Hitler's actions made the May Day issue moot:

I presume that by May we shall either have brought about such a *rapprochement* between the European Powers, including Germany and Russia, that visits of this sort can take place without creating any great stir, as in times of peace, or (more probably, perhaps) find ourselves in a position where we shall need to give every possible encouragement to the forces working for the preservation of the European *status quo*.

Eden saw the situation as a justification of his being 'wary' of Maisky's suggestion. When Phipps seconded Chilston's argument that a May Day visit would 'confirm him [Hitler] in his belief that "collective security" and "encirclement" are synonymous', Eden was confirmed in his judgement. 'So far as our relations with the Soviet are concerned', he wrote, 'I want the footing to be friendly as befits two fellow-members of the League but I have no intention of hugging the bear too closely for I am fully conscious of what happens to people who hug bears. I have no illusions as to the real feelings of the Soviet Government towards the

<sup>15</sup> Chilston to Collier, 11 February 1936, FO 371/20346/N911/187/38, minutes, original emphasis.

capitalist State.<sup>16</sup> When Maisky pushed for Britain, France and Soviet Russia to 'get closely together and strengthen their armaments' before considering having Germany re-join the League, the British response was bland and non-committal.<sup>17</sup>

While the ramifications of the remilitarization of the Rhineland were being assessed, the Far East intruded. In January, the Foreign Office had begun to make progress against the Treasury's attempt to control Far Eastern policy.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Hoare, Eden was not willing to give the Treasury a free hand. While Eden wrote, on 6 January, that Britain should not forget about providing a loan to China just 'because the Japanese frown', this was a remark in keeping with Vansittart's view that there was 'only one remedy for . . . recovering Japanese respect; and that is a rearmed England'. But, until that could be done, British policy was 'to promote a détente in the Far East and foster co-operation rather than join battle [with Japan]'.<sup>19</sup>

By February, the Japanese began to moderate their opposition to Leith-Ross.<sup>20</sup> This change of heart was not thought due to any genuine desire to participate in the loan to China or to find an acceptable compromise with the British. Rather, it was believed to be due to the Japanese desire not to annoy Britain at a time when Japanese relations with Soviet Russia were strained.<sup>21</sup> The British, too, did not want to appear to snub the Japanese, because London wished to maintain the improved Anglo-Japanese naval relations that had resulted from letting Tokyo withdraw from the London Naval Conference without censure.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. T. Emmerson, *The Rhineland Crisis. 7 March 1936* (London, 1977); Chilston to Collier, 27 Feb 1936, FO 371/20339/N1254/20/38; Phipps to Eden, 25 Feb 1936, and reply 28 Feb, FO 371/20339/N1693/20/38, minutes and enclosures.

<sup>17</sup> Cranborne's conversation with Maisky, 9 Mar 1936, FO 371/19889/C1602/4/18.

<sup>18</sup> Cadogan to FO, tel 3, 16 Jan 1936, FO 371/20215/F320/1/10, minutes, Orde (21 Jan), Wellesley (22 Jan) and Vansittart (23 Jan) and Eden to Chamberlain (7 Feb); Clive to FO, tel 25, 21 Jan 1936, FO 371/20215/F364/1/10. Clive's views had changed: Clive to Vansittart, 5 Dec 1935 and reply, 14 Jan 1936, both FO 371/29241/F156/96/10.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, Eden (6 Jan 1936) and Vansittart (6 Jan), both on Clive to Vansittart, 5 Dec 1935, and reply, 14 Jan 1936, both FO 371/292H/F156/96/10.

<sup>20</sup> Leith-Ross to FO, tel 17, 3 Feb 1936, FO 371/20215/F637/1/10; Leith-Ross to FO, tel 18, 3 Feb 1936, FO 371/20215/F638/1/10; Clive to FO, tel 40, 7 Feb 1936, FO 371/20215/F720/1/10; FO 371/20215/F727/1/10; minutes on the above.

<sup>21</sup> Jameson (consul-general, Harbin), disp 13, 13 Jan 1936, FO 371/20263/F673/573/10; Chilston to FO, disp 82, 6 Feb 1936, FO 371/20263/F751/573/10; Howe to FO, tel 71, 17 Feb 1936, FO 371/20234/F881/54/10. The Japanese also professed themselves worried that Britain might be drawing closer to Soviet Russia via the Franco-Soviet Pact, to the detriment of Tokyo's position vis-à-vis Moscow: Drummond (ambassador, Rome) to Vansittart, 21 Feb 1936, Eden Papers, FO 954/6.

<sup>22</sup> Minute, Craigie (20 Feb) on Clive to FO, tels 51 and 52, 19 Feb 1936, FO 371/20215/F987/1/10.



A compromise resulted. The Treasury agreed that Leith-Ross should not take the action of 'threatening or pillorying' the Japanese over the loan, and accepted that, if the Japanese 'remain hostile', any talk of a loan should be dropped altogether. The Foreign Office agreed that Leith-Ross should go to Tokyo.<sup>23</sup> Although the Treasury, and particularly Fisher, wriggled, after much inter-departmental haggling, Leith-Ross went to Tokyo in June.<sup>24</sup> The Foreign Office had regained control of policy.

The Far Eastern Department continued to believe that little could be done to improve Anglo-Japanese relations without British economic interests in China performing 'a sort of economic hara-kiri [sic]'.<sup>25</sup> The room for Anglo-Japanese co-operation was felt to be 'uncommonly narrow', and Britain by itself 'helpless' to stop Japan's push in China.<sup>26</sup> One means of checking Japan was to utilize Tokyo's fears of Soviet Russia. But such a policy would have European repercussions. Orde noted that France would object to Soviet Russia's expending its military strength in a war with Japan, and argued that

the Russian decision would depend ultimately on how much they are afraid of Germany & their estimate of tempi, i.e. their own recovery from a war with Japan & the readiness of Germany to attack them. It would be a hazardous game & I doubt the Russians deciding to play it.<sup>27</sup>

While a war in the Far East was not a favourable prospect, ongoing Soviet-Japanese tension was. In this light, one member of the Far Eastern Department went so far as to suggest that Japan's interests should deliberately be kept focused on the Chinese mainland 'by a policy of [British] pin-pricks' and away from British interests in the south.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Minute, O. Harvey (Eden's private secretary), 21 Feb 1936, on N. Chamberlain to Eden, 19 Feb 1936, FO 371/20216/F1210/1/10.

<sup>24</sup> Squabbling in Eden to N. Chamberlain, 23 Mar 1936, FO 371/20216/F1355/1/10; N. Chamberlain to Eden, 27 Mar 1936 and reply, 7 Apr, FO 371/20216/F1702/1/10; N. Chamberlain to Eden, 28 Apr 1936, and reply 8 May, FO 371/20216/F2359/1/10, minutes, Vansittart (3 May) and Cadogan (7 May); N. Chamberlain to Stanhope, 13 May 1936, and Eden's reply, 20 May, FO 371/20216/F2715/1/10.

<sup>25</sup> Minute (16 Mar) by J. Thyne Henderson, on Clive to FO, very confidential tel, 16 Mar 1936, FO 371/20279/F1431/89/23.

<sup>26</sup> Minute, Orde (18 Mar) on Clive to FO, tel 100, 16 Mar 1936, F 371/20287/F1489/553/23.

<sup>27</sup> Minute, Harcourt-Smith (20 Apr) on Ismay (MI2, WO) to Collier, 3 Apr 1936, FO 371/20349/N1895/307/38, Orde's minute (22 Apr); Howe to FO, tel 86, 22 Feb 1936, FO 371/20242/F1048/96/10; Chilston's report of Stalin's remarks, disp 53, 9 Mar 1936, FO 371/20234/F1429/54/10.

<sup>28</sup> Thyne Henderson's minute (13 May), FO 371/20285/F2678/273/23, Orde's minute (14 May).

Only consideration of Europe prevented this suggestion from being taken seriously.

Soviet-Japanese tensions were particularly valuable, since the British suspected that Japan's future policy might push it southwards. As Vansittart had argued continually, southward expansion by Japan was felt most likely to occur when Britain was involved in a European war. This 'disquieting' likelihood was also linked to Japanese attempts to get on better terms with Moscow since, as Ashton-Gwatkin noted, a Japanese 'preoccupation in Manchuria and N. China together with anxiety about a now much stronger Russia are still the principal checks on Japanese ambitions in the South: together with a diminishing fear of the USA.'<sup>29</sup>

The relationships between Britain, Japan and Soviet Russia in the Far East continued to be complex. Events kept them so. First, in April, the Japanese continued to offer an olive branch to Britain, an offer that the Soviets deprecated.<sup>30</sup> Second, the Soviets also were suspicious (and concerned) that Germany and Japan might sign an alliance.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the British loan discussions with Soviet Russia worried the Japanese. This gave London a 'shadowy & at present a toothless asset' that could be 'dangle[d] in front of the Japanese (& possibly also the Russians) until we can put teeth into it'. Vansittart was depressed by this state of affairs: 'But this perpetual making of bricks without straw is a heartbreaking task for any FO in the long run. A pretty task successive governments have imposed on us for the last decade.' Eden was more practical. His remarks illuminate his concept of policy. 'I agree', he wrote, 'but our commitments are today so vast that in a rapidly re-arming world we cannot hope to have straw enough ever to make all the bricks that would be needed to carry out the policy declared at Geneva by my predecessor last September. We must therefore limit our commitments.'<sup>32</sup>

Eden's means of doing so was to talk to the Germans. This frustrated and annoyed the Soviets.<sup>33</sup> At the Foreign Office, there were many who resented this Soviet attitude. Sargent was bitter about Moscow's attempts to put pressure on the French government. In his view, the

<sup>29</sup> Paragraph based on and quotations from Clive to FO, disp 114, 11 Mar 1936, FO 371/20285/F2032/273/23, minutes.

<sup>30</sup> Clive to FO, disp 194, 8 Apr 1936, FO 371/20279/F2493/89/23, minutes.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes, Clive to FO, disp 219, 23 Apr 1936, FO 371/20285/F2763/303/23.

<sup>32</sup> Thyne Henderson's minute (c. 20 May) on Clive to FO, private and confidential, 22 Apr 1936, FO 371/20279/F2372/89/23. Eden was referring to Hoare's efforts to stiffen the French: Peters, *Eden*, 129–32.

<sup>33</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 186–202; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933–1939* (London, 1984), 98–102.

'extreme Left' in France were 'of course in the pockets of the Bolsheviks and are playing the Russian game, no doubt with the help of Russian money'.<sup>34</sup> From Moscow, Chilston commented on the 'smug provinciality' of the Soviet coverage of the Rhineland crisis and the 'furious [Soviet] indignation with His Majesty's government for attempting to deal with the problem on its own merits rather than as an object-lesson for the enemies of the Soviet Union'.<sup>35</sup>

There was also speculation about what the Soviets might do militarily, conjecture resulting from rumours that Soviet aircraft had flown to Prague in response to the Rhineland crisis.<sup>36</sup> While the Soviets termed this rumour a 'complete canard', Vansittart insisted that 'we must get to the bottom of this', in order to prevent the Germans from using it as justification for their actions.<sup>37</sup> At the War Office, the rumours generated a long analysis of Soviet policy. That department believed that, 'other things being equal, Russia does not want war at the present time'. However, as Moscow was 'terrified of Germany and convinced that it is only a matter of time before she attacks her', the Soviets might launch a pre-emptive assault against the Nazi regime. While it was 'widely believed' that Japan would attack Soviet Russia whenever the latter was 'committed to war in the West', the War Office contended that Tokyo might not do so if Moscow took the initiative against Germany. The conclusion showed clearly the War Office's distrust of the Soviets:

(i) The present crisis in Europe has presented Russia with the opportunity of acquiring dazzling prizes at a minimum of risk. It is, therefore, all to her advantage that Germany should be induced to adopt a truculent attitude and be mobbed by the rest of Europe.

(ii) The use of Czechoslovakian aerodromes by Russian aircraft would almost certainly induce Hitler to take desperate measures. Even the rumour of any such intention might appreciably help to keep the European pot a-boiling.

(iii) It is therefore probable that the Soviets have themselves put a rumour into circulation. They are past masters at this sort of game.

(iv) The moral to be drawn by us is: – 'Watch Russia.'

Collier disagreed. He believed not only that the Germans had started the rumour for their own ends, but also that the War Office's 'memorandum

<sup>34</sup> Sargent's memo (19 Mar) on Clerk to FO, tel 146, 18 Mar 1936, FO 371/19894/C2048/4/18.

<sup>35</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 190, 24 Mar 1936, FO 371/19898/C2422/4/18.

<sup>36</sup> Rumoured, FO to Chilston, tel 31, 14 Mar 1936, FO 371/19892/C1887/4/18, and reply, tel 32, 15 Mar 1936, FO 371/19892/C1897/4/18, minutes.

<sup>37</sup> Vansittart's minute (c. 25 Mar 1936) on Phipps to FO, tel 59, 23 Mar 1936, FO 371/20376/R1681/1162/12.

bristles with doubtful statements'.<sup>38</sup> Despite varying interpretations, one thing was not in doubt: the episode reinforced the War Office's earlier rejection of the Foreign Office's Far Eastern policy.

Throughout April and May, the British continued to look for a wider settlement with Germany. The Soviets were irritated. On 28 April, Maitsky told Eden that Moscow was 'perturbed' with the British tendency to take a firm line with Italy, but to make 'excuses' for German actions.<sup>39</sup> The well-informed Soviet ambassador enquired whether the British were planning to amend the League Covenant in order to entice Germany to rejoin the League. Eden avoided giving a direct answer, as this was indeed the case. To emphasize the friendly Soviet attitude towards Britain, Maitsky dangled the possibility that Soviet Russia would be willing to 'co-operate in the negotiation of a naval agreement', referring to the ongoing British efforts to patch up a naval arms-limitation pact in the aftermath of the Japanese withdrawal from the London Conference.<sup>40</sup>

After the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact on 2 May, the Soviets continued to pursue this carrot-and-stick policy towards the British. On the one hand, Soviet officials attempted to draw the British closer to Moscow.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Moscow threatened that, if British diplomacy continued to favour Germany, Soviet Russia would have to look to its own devices. Collier found this Soviet attitude 'not surprising', given what he termed the 'almost abject overtures to Germany publicly made from certain quarters here'.<sup>42</sup>

Much of this mixed reception of Soviet policy was tied to events in France, where the leftist Front populaire, under the leadership of Léon Blum, won an electoral victory in late April-early May. Again, Franco-Soviet relations and the influence of the French Communists seemed likely to impede British efforts to achieve a general settlement.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> 'The Soviet attitude Towards the Present crisis in Europe', MI2, WO, 27 Mar 1936, FO 371/20376/R1983/1162/12, minute, Collier (13 May).

<sup>39</sup> Eden to MacKillop (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow), disp 247, 28 Apr 1936, FO 371/19904/C3231/4/18.

<sup>40</sup> FP (36), minutes 1st meeting, 30 Apr 1936, Cab 27/622; Haslam, *Struggle for Collective Security*, 76-8.

<sup>41</sup> Maitsky to Collier, 18 May 1936, FO 371/20349/N2687/307/38; MacKillop to FO, disp 289, 18 May 1936, FO 371/20349/N2731/307/38.

<sup>42</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 291 important, 19 May 1936, FO 371/20349/N2733/307/38, Collier's minute (22 May). These 'quarters' included Baldwin: see Thomas Jones to Abraham Flexner (director, Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton), 23 May 1936, in T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950* (London, 1954), 209.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement. Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford, 1996), 55-6. There were mixed opinions about whether the French Communists were working to undermine French power: minutes on all of Phipps to

On 14 May, Hitler conflated the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact and Blum's victory to argue that this would 'drag' France 'down into the Bolshevik pit'.<sup>44</sup> The German leader then dilated on how this made any suggested general settlement impossible, as 'France has "brought back Russia into Europe"'. A day later, Blum surprised Eden by telling the foreign secretary that Soviet Russia favoured a Western European Pact, but that he, himself, favoured 'a Locarno which would apply to Europe as a whole'.<sup>45</sup> Wigram worried about Blum's lack of understanding of the Soviet position, but both he and Vansittart also rejected Hitler's arguments. 'We shall have to go on with exploration [of an Anglo-German general settlement]', the PUS noted, 'though without illusions'.<sup>46</sup> Eden saw a silver lining. Continued negotiations would at least 'make it more difficult for Herr Hitler to take refuge in evasion'.<sup>47</sup>

Collier was in the midst of this debate over how Moscow affected British policy. At the end of May, the Soviets argued that any Anglo-German *rapprochement* would cause the formation of a bloc of those powers opposed to Germany. When Collier noted that 'Luckily for Anglo-Russian relations the prospect of an Anglo-German agreement is rapidly receding!', Wigram was not impressed. '[I]t might with some justice be observed', the head of Central Department sniffed, 'that it augurs ill for the future of Anglo Russian relations that it should in any way be necessary to base them on discord or lack of agreement between Britain and some third Power'. Collier fired a broadside at his opposite number, pointing out the obvious linkage:

It is an inevitable consequence of *German* policy towards Russia. If we are friends with Germany without changing that policy, we cannot expect to be friends with Russia. One might almost as well expect us to be friends with Italy and loved by the Abyssinians.<sup>48</sup>

Opinions within the FO were divided over the place of Soviet Russia.

FO, tel 190, 12 Jun 1936, FO 371/19857/C4255/1/17; Clerk to FO, tel 132, 15 Jun 1936, FO 371/19857/C4319/1/17; Clerk to FO, disp 833, 27 Jun 1936, FO 371/19857/C4703/1/17.

<sup>44</sup> Phipps to Eden, tel 175, 14 May 1936, Phipps Papers, PHPP 1/16.

<sup>45</sup> Eden's conversation with Blum, 15 May 1936, FO 371/19880/C3693/92/62, minute, Wigram (18 May).

<sup>46</sup> Their minutes (15 and 17 May) and Eden's (18 May) on Phipps to FO, tel 179, 15 May 1936, FO 371/12205/C3677/4/18.

<sup>47</sup> Eden was more determined and optimistic than his officials about German negotiations: minutes, Wigram (27 May), Sargent (28 May), Vansittart (1 Jun) and Eden (5 Jun 1936), all FO 371/19906/C3879/4/18.

<sup>48</sup> MacKillop to FO, tel 9 saving, 26 May 1936, FO 371/20349/N2828/307/38, minutes, Collier (29 May), Wigram (4 Jun) and Collier (2nd, 7 Jun), original emphasis.

The discussion of the wider ramifications of a deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations began in early June, sparked by a dispatch from Moscow outlining recent anti-British remarks in the Soviet press. Collier saw wider implications. He did not agree with the Soviet assumption that Anglo-German relations were getting closer to the detriment of Soviet interests. However, he was not, he told the British *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow, confident of Britain's 'invulnerability to Soviet hostility – in Asia at any rate'. And he noted with regard to the Far East, 'we are rapidly becoming more vulnerable to the Japanese menace than are the Soviet Government – if indeed we have not become so already'.<sup>49</sup> This spoke directly to the state of affairs in that region. Throughout May, the Soviets had criticized Japan's aggression, and border incidents between the two countries were endemic.<sup>50</sup> The Japanese had continued to seek better relations with Britain, making clear their desire for London's support against Soviet Russia. The British remained suspicious of Japanese motives, wondering '[s]hall we not merely be next on the menu if we help Japan to beat Russia?' But the proper British policy was not evident, for, on the other hand, 'we do not wish to see Russia crush Japan because that would bring us back to the pre-war Russian menace to India & possibly Europe also, with the new & insidious weapon of Communist agitation in Russia's armoury'.<sup>51</sup> Prudence dictated remaining neutral and extracting such benefits as could be found in Russo-Japanese hostility. And this was closely tied to China.

On 19 June, before departing from China for Tokyo, Leith-Ross had a farewell interview with Chiang Kai-shek. At it, the Chinese Nationalist leader raised the possibility of a 'Sino-Soviet alliance' and 'some sort of arrangement which would approximate to a Far Eastern regional pact'. In the Far Eastern Department, Thyne Henderson was sceptical about the possibility, citing the 'classic reluctance of the Soviet Government to be dragged into wars, except for the protection of the USSR or of Outer Mongolia'. He went on to note the close linkage between Europe and the Far East. 'I am inclined to doubt', he wrote, 'whether with their [Soviet] European pre-occupations they would raise a finger to prevent the over-running of China by Japan in a conjuncture which in no way involved Russian interests.' As to a multi-lateral pact, he was dismissive. This

<sup>49</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 310, 30 May 1936, FO 371/20340/N2957/20/38, minutes, esp. Collier, 10 Jun and Collier to MacKillop, 11 Jun 1936.

<sup>50</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 264, 4 May 1936, FO 371/20263/F2610/573/10; MacKillop to FO, disp 294, 22 May 1936, FO 371/29287/F2930/553/23.

<sup>51</sup> Clive to FO, disp 232, 30 Apr 1936, FO 371/20279/F3115/89/23, Thyne Henderson's minute (6 Jun); Clive to FO, disp 275, 21 May 1936, FO 371/20279/F3476/89/23; Clive to FO, tel 182, 13 Jun 1936, FO 371/20277/F3417/3390/10.

would 'be of small value without America', and Washington's participation was 'doubtful'.<sup>52</sup> Collier regretfully agreed. The Foreign Office was not, however, under any illusions about Japanese intentions towards British interests in the Far East. In mid-June, Vansittart tied the European, Far Eastern and Soviet aspects together in a minute on an ominous dispatch from Tokyo. 'The Japanese', the PUS observed, 'are going south as soon as the Germans go east – or west.'<sup>53</sup>

Over the summer of 1936, several things affected Anglo-Soviet relations. First, there was Eden's continued quest for better relations with Germany. Second, after its outbreak on 18 July, there was the Spanish Civil War.<sup>54</sup> Mixed in with this was the Montreux Conference, held to reconsider the Straits Convention of Lausanne.<sup>55</sup> This was a volatile brew. At the Foreign Office, opinions varied about policy generally and the Soviet role in particular. On 8 July, Craigie argued that, 'if the principle of collective security is to be preserved in any form, it can only remain in the form of mutual assistance arrangements between groups of Powers vitally interested in the maintenance of peace in a particular region'. Such arrangements had to be within 'the framework of the League', and should be in the nature of the Locarno agreement and not take the form of 'defensive alliances against the discontented States'. A 'Western Locarno', Craigie continued, necessitated getting on better terms with Germany. He also suggested that 'much' of what was 'unreasonable and defiant' in Hitler's attitude resulted from his 'apprehension and distaste' for Soviet Russia and the 'steady increase of Russian influence in the affairs of Europe'.<sup>56</sup> Craigie wished to treat Germany on the basis of 'complete equality' with France. Reflecting his ongoing naval negotiations and the threat that Italy posed to Britain's imperial communications, Craigie also advocated a 'Mediterranean Locarno', one including both France and Italy.

Vansittart agreed with the latter, but not about Germany. The PUS felt that it was Germany's actions that frightened its neighbours, and wondered: 'Is there really such a great difference in the methods of Nazism & Communism?' Wigram rejected the idea that Britain had

<sup>52</sup> Following based on Howe to FO, tel 104, 21 Jun 1936, FO 371/20250/F3715/166/10, minutes, Thyne Henderson (27 Jun) and Collier (30 Jun).

<sup>53</sup> His minute (14 Jun) on Clive to FO, disp 254, 8 May 1936, FO 371/20285/F3131/273/23.

<sup>54</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 220–59.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Montreux Conference to Consider the Revision of the Straits Convention of Lausanne', CP 163(36), Eden, 15 Jun 1936, Cab 24/262.

<sup>56</sup> The remainder of this and the following paragraph are based on 'Regional Pacts and Extent to which the United Kingdom should participate', Craigie, 8 Jul 1936, FO 371/19910/C5313/4/18, minutes (9–11 Jul).

treated Germany less favourably than France. Nor did he accept the idea that Britain should take an even-handed attitude – a ‘Locarno’ position – towards Germany: ‘The potential aggressor in Western Europe is Germany so far as our interests are concerned; and though we may work for an agreement on the Locarno model, we must surely not, whatever Germany says, allow ourselves to limit in any way our freedom of action.’ Like Vansittart, Wigram did not believe that German policy was based on an understandable fear of Bolshevism. Finally, in a dig at Craigie’s own achievement, the head of the Central Department challenged the idea that piecemeal settlements – such as the Anglo-German Naval Agreement – were very satisfactory.

What to do became an issue for the Cabinet. On 15 and 16 July, it considered both the ongoing discussions at Montreux and whether the Locarno powers should meet at Brussels to consider the ramifications of the Rhineland occupation.<sup>57</sup> The play of Soviet Russia on British policy was evident. With respect to Brussels, it was decided to convene a more limited meeting, if only to prevent it seeming that the ‘Western Powers had lost the initiative and that it was left to the Dictators’.<sup>58</sup> The Foreign Office, where opinion held that calling a conference without Germany and Italy would drive the two together, opposed even this.<sup>59</sup> Further, any attempt to craft a wider settlement – a ‘new Locarno’ for western Europe – would founder on the ‘Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet Pacts and what Germans will make of them’. Concomitantly, there would be a French objection: ‘In view of their Central European and particularly Russian commitments, it is difficult to see how they could agree to a settlement with Germany which left her a free hand in Eastern and Central Europe.’<sup>60</sup> Certainly, Litvinov had made this point clear to Eden in late June.<sup>61</sup>

Vansittart was unimpressed.<sup>62</sup> He saw the Cabinet’s position as equivalent to Craigie’s policy of piecemeal settlements and a pandering to public opinion, as expressed in *The Times*.<sup>63</sup> The PUS wanted to ensure that such policies raised no false hopes that would interfere with

<sup>57</sup> Minutes, Cab 52(36), 15 Jul 1936 and Cab 53(36), both Cab 23/85.

<sup>58</sup> Foreign Policy Committee; FP (36), minutes, 2nd meeting, 15 Jul 1936, Cab 27/622.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Memorandum’, 14 Jul 1936 of a meeting between Halifax, Vansittart, Cranborne and others, FO 371/19909/C51995/4/18.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Memorandum’, FP(36) 6, 13 Jul 1936, Cab 27/626; minutes on FO 371/19909/C5052/4/18 show that Sargent and Wigram were the authors.

<sup>61</sup> Eden to FO, tel 75, 27 Jun 1936, Eden Papers, FO 954/24.

<sup>62</sup> His minute and those of Wigram and Sargent (22 Jul) on the Cabinet Conclusion, 19 Jul 1936, all FO 371/19910/C5314/4/18.

<sup>63</sup> For attitudes at *The Times*, see Gordon Martel, ed., *The Times and Appeasement. The Journals of A. L. Kennedy* (Cambridge, 2000), 236–9.



rearmament. Equally, he felt that an agreement that 'seemed to give Germany any warrant for a free hand in the centre of the east of Europe' would only accelerate Germany's regrowth and perhaps make it ready to advance in the West sooner. For Collier, such a policy threatened to upset all of Anglo-Soviet relations. He termed it a 'disastrous *volte-face*', and stated that, if British policy were to be driven by certain sectors of public opinion, then 'the Northern Department might as well shut up shop'.<sup>64</sup>

The issues at Montreux, too, showed the intertwined nature of disparate policies. Eden and Litvinov spoke about the Straits on 27 June.<sup>65</sup> Eden preferred to maintain the existing arrangement, while Litvinov favoured a more complicated one. While there was no British objection to a Turkish proposal to remilitarize the Straits, a subsequent insistence by France, Romania and Russia that the Straits be closed in time of war to all belligerent warships 'except those acting in virtue, not only of the Covenant, *but of any regional pact*', was highly contentious.<sup>66</sup> The British preferred an agreement that applied only if Turkey were part of the regional pact, as the alternative reading would allow Soviet Russia, through the Franco-Soviet Pact and France's arrangements with Romania, to close the Straits to German and Italian ships and make the Black Sea into a safe harbour.<sup>67</sup> This, in turn, might, as Hoare (now First Lord of the Admiralty) put it in the Cabinet on 15 July, cause 'resentment' in Berlin and let the Soviets build up a secure Black Sea fleet that could later be sent to the Baltic, upsetting the naval balance between Germany and Soviet Russia. The Germans might then refuse to sign the separate Anglo-German accord that was required to make the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1936 come into effect. Instead, the British accepted a modified position put forward by Moscow. This settlement – what the Foreign Office called a 'feather in our cap' – essentially let the Turks control the Straits as they saw fit.<sup>68</sup> The British

<sup>64</sup> Collier's minute (11 Jul) on MacKillop to Collier, 15 Jun 1936, FO 371/20340/N3215/20/38.

<sup>65</sup> Eden to FO, tel 72, 27 Jun 1936, Eden Papers, FO 954/24.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, Cab 52(36), 15 Jul 1936, Cab 23/85, original emphasis; see also Loraine to Oliphant, 10 Apr and 30 May 1936, both Loraine Papers, FO 1011/37; Sir George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive. Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service 1913–1954* (London, 1957), 87–96.

<sup>67</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 162, 1 Jul 1936, FO 371/19838/A5635/4671/45; Craigie's conversations with Prince Bismarck (German *chargé d'affaires*, London), 6 and 9 Jul 1936, FO 371/19838/A5821 and A5822/4671/45; Newton (Berlin) to FO, tel 171, 7 Jul 1936, FO 371/19838/A5908/4671/45; Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939. A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1998), 52–4; Brock Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance. Anglo-Turkish Relations 1939–1940* (Montreal and Kingston, 1998), 69–85.

<sup>68</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 16 Jul 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4.

accepted it because it was evident that Ankara might otherwise accept the French, Romanian and Soviet proposal.<sup>69</sup> But the importance of all this was that, once again, Britain found that its negotiations with Germany were affected by Soviet concerns.<sup>70</sup>

This had another facet. In late June, the War Office reported that the Soviets had twice asked for a high-ranking British military officer to go to Russia to observe the Soviet autumn manoeuvres. Such a visit was seen as less offensive to German susceptibilities than the earlier visit by Duff Cooper would have been, and was approved. But Vansittart made certain that the deputation was not overly large or 'out of scale'. 'We don't want the Russian manoeuvres', he cautioned, 'to be the *only* ones to which we send a general.' But this was a delicate matter, for if the British refused to send any delegation at all, 'we should soon be accused of boycotting Russia! (Cui bono?).'<sup>71</sup>

With regard to Anglo-Soviet relations narrowly defined, the rest of the summer and early autumn of 1936 was taken up by discussions of two matters: the beginning of the Show Trials of Zinoviev and Kamenev, two old Bolsheviks, and the state of affairs in the Far East. With regard to the former, the Foreign Office had difficulty coming to terms with what Collier termed 'this strange and horrible affair'. He got to the heart of the matter on 13 October, when he noted on another dispatch concerning further arrests, trials and the removal of G. G. Yagoda as commissar of internal affairs (and, not coincidentally, the man in charge of the Soviet security service – OGPU): 'I suspect that Stalin is utilising this affair to get rid of potential opposition anywhere – in the communist party, in the army, or in the OGPU.'<sup>72</sup>

While the Purges were being played out in Soviet Russia, Anglo-Japanese relations continued in their delicate balance. In Tokyo, Clive was convinced that the continuing overtures to Britain from Japan reflected the latter's fear of the growth of Soviet power. In London, Harcourt-Smith found this state of affairs 'no bad thing'. 'So long as our European preoccupations continue on their present scale', he wrote, 'the Russian bogey is almost the only adequate protection available for

<sup>69</sup> Oliphant to Loraine, 6 Aug 1936, Loraine Papers, FO 1011/38.

<sup>70</sup> Greg Kennedy, 'Becoming Dependent on the Kindness of Strangers. Britain's Strategic Foreign Policy, Naval Arms Limitation and the Soviet Factor: 1935–1937', *WH*, 11, 1 (2004), 34–60.

<sup>71</sup> Oliphant's minute, 26 Jun 1936, FO 371/20352/N3356/1298/38, minutes; Vansittart's conversation with Maisky, 30 Jun 1936, FO 371/20352/N3395/1298/38 and minutes original emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> Collier's minute (31 Aug) on Chilston to FO, disp 487, 19 Aug 1936, FO 371/20350/N4324/565/38; Collier's minute (13 Oct) on MacKillop to FO, disp 565, 1 Oct 1936, FO 371/20351/N4997/565/38.

our Pacific interests.' On the other hand, he noted that 'any sort of *rapprochement* between Japan & Russia would, I venture to think[,] be disastrous for our interests'. Orde agreed that Soviet Russia was 'the best brake on Japan', but cautioned that Russo-Japanese relations were 'too uncertain a field to intrigue in with the object of increasing the application of the brake'.<sup>73</sup>

But nor were the British about to be blackmailed into seeking improved Anglo-Japanese relations by the latter's raising the spectre of a communist takeover in China. 'The Japanese are afraid of Communism for themselves', Thyne Henderson noted, '& they try to scare us by pretending that it would harm our interests if China went Communist. Perhaps it would, to some extent, but not necessarily more than they are being harmed by Japan. We only want to trade peacefully with China, & we have managed to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with Russia, why not with China?' In fact, he believed that Japan's depredations in China were 'more likely to turn that country towards Communism (or at least Russia) than would be likely if they [the Japanese] helped China to become strong and independent'.<sup>74</sup>

For such reasons, the British were careful not to take the initiative in Anglo-Japanese relations.<sup>75</sup> Despite this, in August the Japanese press reported that Hoare had offered concessions to Tokyo in exchange for Japan's agreeing to naval limitations. There was little doubt at the Foreign Office as to why such a report had been inspired: 'Japan feels herself friendless and she is becoming afraid of Russia. Of the three great Powers whose friendship is valuable to her, the British Empire, USA and USSR, the first, for various reasons, is preferable. So she flies a kite . . . & pretends that Britain is seeking Japanese friendship.' Craigie agreed: 'it would be fatal for *us* to have any appearance of running after *her*'. He deprecated letting Japan think that 'her accession to the London Naval Treaty could be made a part of any Anglo-Japanese bargain – she would only play us up indefinitely on this issue'.<sup>76</sup> The Far Eastern Department was further convinced that Japanese policy, 'whether expressed by fire-eaters or the more methodical merchant magnates', aimed at dominating the Far East.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Clive to FO, disp 304, 3 Jun 1936, FO 371/20279/F3900/89/23, minutes (15 and 16 Jul).

<sup>74</sup> Lindley's conversation, 21 Jul 1936, with Yoshida (Japanese ambassador to London), FO 371/20277/F4808/3390/10, Thyne Henderson's minute (13 Aug).

<sup>75</sup> Eden to Clive, disp 368, 30 Jul 1936, FO 371/20277/F4625/3390/10.

<sup>76</sup> Clive to FO, tel 229, 7 Aug 1936, FO 371/20279/F4778/39/23, minutes original emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> Quotation from Thyne Henderson's minute (29 Aug) on Chancery (Tokyo) to FO, 30 Jul 1936, FO 371/20285/F5135/273/23; his minute on Clive to FO, disp 421, 30 Jul 1936, FO 371/20279/F5148/89/23.

European affairs were also not without interest. While the British waited for the German response about a possible new Locarno, there was debate about how the Franco-Soviet Pact played on this, the possibility of combining it with an eastern European Locarno, and the impact on France of a possible victory by the Republicans in Spain. This latter was also a political issue. On 26 July, Baldwin told Eden 'that on no account, French or other, must he bring us in to fight on the side of the Russians'.<sup>78</sup> This concern about Spain played on Baldwin's views generally about Soviet Russia. On 28 and 29 July, he met a delegation of MPs to discuss foreign policy and rearmament. After Baldwin outlined the difficulties of dealing with unpredictable dictators, he made the following point:

There is one danger, of course, which has probably been in all your minds – supposing the Russians and Germans got fighting and the French went in as allies of Russia owing to that appalling pact they made, you would not feel you were obligated to go and help France, would you? If there is any fighting in Europe to be done, I should like to see the Bolshies and the Nazis doing it.<sup>79</sup>

From France, the British ambassador was not overly concerned about the possible 'Sovietisation' of that country, but did fear that the Front populaire government might take France further to the Left, especially if the Republicans were to win in Spain, a concern that Eden shared.<sup>80</sup>

The Soviet linkage to France was an irritant that complicated both efforts to conclude any security pacts and endeavours to tighten Anglo-French defence arrangements. While returning from the Berlin Olympics, Vansittart made this point clear to Alexis Léger, the secretary-general at the French foreign ministry. Léger agreed, but noted that no French government could abandon its existing pacts with Poland, the Little Entente and Soviet Russia. Vansittart found himself 'relieved' that Léger did not wish to push Hitler where he would not go:

for English opinion wished to try out, with wide-open eyes, the policy of *autant croire* [here: 'for want of better, we may as well believe'], and if France, at Russian instigation, blocked it, M. Blum would lose at the British swings more than he could win at the Russian roundabouts . . . the British government was upheld by a very large Conservative majority, who were never prepared, and now probably less than ever, to make much sacrifice for red eyes.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> T. Jones diary entry, 27 Jul 1936, in T. Jones, *Diary with Letters*, 231.

<sup>79</sup> Based on the account of meeting in Prem 1/193, attached to a secret letter from Hankey to Baldwin, 24 Jul 1936.

<sup>80</sup> Clerk to FO, disp 1164, 8 Sept 1936, FO 371/19859/C6328/1/17, minutes; Michael Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936–1940* (London, 1999), 47–8.

<sup>81</sup> Oliphant to Loraine, 6 Aug 1936, Loraine Papers, FO 1011/38; Vansittart's untitled memo, 17 Sept 1936, FO 371/19912/C6528/4/18 translation by Professor Mark

There were other manifestations of the continued Soviet attempts to bind France and other states into an anti-German front.

On 22 September, the Foreign Office received a report that the Czechs were attempting to get a military convention with Soviet Russia, and that the latter was attempting to push the French into a similar arrangement. While Wigram felt it understandable that the French wished for the 'greater certainty of a military convention with Russia', he noted that 'its conclusion would clearly be a dangerous move and its effect on public opinion in this country would surely be very bad'. Sargent advocated 'put[ting] a spoke in their [the Soviets'] wheel'. For him, any Franco-Russian military convention would be a disaster for British diplomacy:

If we still have any belief in the possibility of a Western settlement or the Five Power Conference we must realise that this possibility would be completely destroyed if, during the preliminary exchange of views, it emerged that France had not merely refused to modify her Pact with Russia, but had strengthened and supplemented it by a military agreement.<sup>82</sup>

With such attitudes current, it was no wonder that the Soviets believed that 'France and Britain lack a definite policy of action and the will to repel an aggressor' and that London was relieved when reports from Paris discounted the likelihood of any Franco-Soviet military pact.<sup>83</sup>

These concerns carried on into October. Phipps reported from Berlin that there was as yet little movement in favour of the proposed five-power conference. Wigram did not wish to press the Germans, but was concerned about France. Sargent saw the fine hand of Soviet Russia everywhere: 'The other consideration which we ought to bear in mind is that Russia is working as hard as she can to prevent the conclusion of a new Locarno.' Sargent felt that this alone 'would have been sufficient' to make Hitler wish for a conference, but contended that Hitler 'does not want . . . a *Conference* in which he feels that Russia, even though absent, would exercise . . . a very strong anti-German influence'. Vansittart's and Eden's comments were contradictory, and reflected their differing attitudes about Germany. The PUS did not want to press the Germans about a five-power pact, but added that 'I hope we shall *pay* nothing for an agreement that is problematical both as to signature & value: it will be

Benson; for Léger, see Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making 1933–1939* (Oxford, 2000), 74–5 and, esp. in 1936, 200–1, 243.

<sup>82</sup> R. Campbell (minister, Belgrade) to FO, tel 97, 22 Sept 1936, FO 371/19880/C6630/92/62, minutes, Wigram, Sargent (both 24 Sept).

<sup>83</sup> MacKillop (Moscow) to FO, tel 150, 29 Sept 1936, FO 371/19880/C6811/92/62; Clerk to FO, tel 361, 30 Sept 1936, FO 371/19880/C6814/92/62, minutes.

worthless until it has proved its worth in practice. And I hope that we shall insist on a settlement in Central Europe.' Eden's minute was pointed. Government 'policy' was reflected in the earlier communiqués that supported a five-power pact.<sup>84</sup>

This exchange highlighted the fact that the foreign secretary had lost faith in his PUS. In fact, Eden had been attempting to remove Vansittart from office for some time. In March, the foreign secretary had recalled Cadogan, with whom he previously had worked closely in Geneva, from China.<sup>85</sup> When Cadogan arrived in London, Eden asked his former colleague to outline his 'ideas' about world affairs. Cadogan argued that the Covenant was 'unworkable and should be reconsidered'.<sup>86</sup> Vansittart was opposed to this, and tried to hold his ground. He told Eden that Cadogan's 'remedy . . . would prove to be too heroic' and warned the latter that he was 'staying on indefinitely' as PUS.<sup>87</sup> After acting as the British delegate at Montreux in July, Cadogan found himself sidetracked at the Foreign Office.<sup>88</sup> In mid-September, Eden tried to persuade Vansittart to accept the Paris embassy, but the PUS argued that this would 'create the wrong impression' about the direction of British policy.<sup>89</sup> Vansittart also continued to attempt to limit Cadogan's influence on Eden, and Cadogan found himself with 'nothing to do'. 'Well', he lamented to his diary on 21 September, 'I'm not going to butt in, but what did they bring me back for? Van of course won't say & does nothing about it. A[n]thony Eden] *doesn't* say.'<sup>90</sup> By mid-October a *modus vivendi* had been worked out, wherein Cadogan 'retain[ed] the Far East, & [kept] a watch on the rest', but this was only a temporary patch.<sup>91</sup> Vansittart and, by extension his policy towards Germany in particular, did not have firm backing at the top.<sup>92</sup>

The concern about the impact of Soviet Russia on both Germany and Japan carried on into October. In that month, considerations of Anglo-Japanese relations, rumours of a possible German-Japanese agreement

<sup>84</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 264, 30 Sept 1936, FO 371/19913/C6815/4/18, minutes, Wigram (1 Oct), Sargent (2 Oct), Vansittart (6 Oct) and Eden (8 Oct) original emphasis.

<sup>85</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 148.

<sup>86</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 7 May 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4; Cadogan's remarks in his undated letter to Eden, FO 371/20473/W4508/79/98, with a covering letter from Vansittart, 15 May 1936.

<sup>87</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 4 May 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4.

<sup>88</sup> Cadogan diary entries, 13 Aug, 28 Aug and 8 Sept 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/4.

<sup>89</sup> Vansittart to Eden, 14 Sept 1936, Avon Papers, AP 14/1/631. For Cadogan's discovery of Eden's intentions see Cadogan diary entry, 14 Oct 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/5.

<sup>90</sup> Cadogan diary entries, 18, 20 and 21 Sept 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/5 original emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 15 Oct 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/5.

<sup>92</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 256.

and the results of the British Military Delegation's (BMD) visit to Soviet Russia in September percolated together to create a heady brew.<sup>93</sup> The BMD formed a favourable impression of Soviet capabilities, especially on the defensive, an impression later reinforced with respect to the Soviet military-industrial capacity. Soviet military strength was welcome. As Collier noted: 'A Russian army strong enough to discourage adventures by Hitler or the Japanese but not strong enough to indulge in adventures of its own, seems to me just what suits us!'<sup>94</sup> So, too, did its political orientation. In discussions with Voroshilov, the head of the BMD found the Soviet commissar profoundly anti-German.<sup>95</sup> The BMD's visit also had its effect in the Far East. Reflecting their preoccupation with Soviet Russia, the Japanese were anxious about the portents of the visit. The new Japanese ambassador at London, Yoshida Shigeru, told Vansittart that the Japanese military had found Soviet Russia 'stronger than they expected' as a result of the Franco-Soviet (and, by extension, any possible future Anglo-Soviet) military collaboration. He also emphasized the Japanese desire for better Anglo-Japanese relations.<sup>96</sup>

What did this mean for Anglo-Soviet relations? One possibility originated from a report from Berlin that many German military officers would prefer Soviet Russia as an ally. This led to contentious analysis. Wigram argued that such an event would 'present very great dangers for Europe and ourselves', but comforted himself by noting that even Bismarck had been unable to do more than achieve a 'stabilisation' of Russo-German relations. Wigram saw the Franco-Soviet Treaty as an 'obstacle' to such a *rapprochement* and, as such, a 'considerable advantage' to Britain. Collier agreed, arguing, in the fashion of Wigram, that the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet Treaties 'are of real use in stabilising the European situation, though they work indirectly rather than directly'. This was anathema to Sargent. 'The disadvantages of the Franco-Soviet Pact are

<sup>93</sup> British Library of Information, New York to Far Eastern Department, 16 Sept 1936, FO 371/20285/F5797/303/23; Clive to FO, disp 513, 24 Sept 1936, FO 371/20285/F6483/303/23; 'Progress Towards a German-Japanese Pact', ns (but MI3, WO), 29 Sept 1936, WO 190/461.

<sup>94</sup> Wavell's report (dated 10 Sept) attached to Maj. Hayes (MI2, WO) to Collier, 9 Oct 1936, FO 371/20352/N5048/1298/38, Collier's minute (16 Oct); 'Report on Visit to USSR Red Army Manoeuvres in the White Russian Military District - Minsk', secret, Wing Commander [illegible], Sept 1936, Air 9/58; Hankey to Vansittart, 14 Oct 1936, enclosing 'Conditions in Russia' Maj.-Gen. Haining (MI2, WO) to Hankey, 20 Oct 1936 and 31 Oct 1936, secret Vansittart to Hankey, 26 Oct 1936, all Cab 21/418.

<sup>95</sup> Collier's minute (30 Sept) on MacKillop to FO, disp 551, 21 Sept 1936, FO 371/20349/N4796/307/38.

<sup>96</sup> Vansittart's conversation with the Japanese ambassador, 23 Sept 1936, FO 371/29279/F5842/89/23.



so manifest, and we suffer from them so often and in so many ways', he minuted sarcastically, 'that I am always glad to hear that there may be hidden & hypothetical benefits to be derived indirectly from this instrument.'<sup>97</sup> Sargent's antipathy stemmed from a long chain of consequences that he saw resulting from the Franco-Soviet Pact.<sup>98</sup> He feared that the French, under political pressure from Moscow, might agree to military conversations, which in turn would torpedo the five-power conference and, conceivably, lead to Franco-German hostilities that would inevitably draw in Britain. Despite soothing remarks from the French, persistent reports from Berlin about the possibility of improved German-Soviet relations prompted the Foreign Office to take soundings in Moscow.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, the Moscow embassy suggested that, in case of war, Britain and Soviet Russia would find themselves allies. The Foreign Office was again divided. Some felt that this would be unacceptable to British public opinion except in particular circumstances. Collier not only rejected this, but also pointed out that such considerations were 'irrelevant':

if war once breaks out in Europe, it is likely sooner or later to involve *all* the Great Powers, including this country and the Soviet Union, and . . . in that case it is more probable than not that these two Powers will find themselves fighting on the same side, for reasons quite unconnected with their relations with each other.<sup>100</sup>

This was prescient, but there were other speculations, stemming from the Tokyo embassy and from an initiative by Yoshida in London. One conjecture was that a Russo-Japanese *rapprochement* was likely, something felt 'by no means comfortable for us'. If Soviet Russia were felt by Japan to be 'too strong to be attacked', Japan would turn southwards against Britain's interests. Orde did not share this apprehension: 'Unless Russia decides to liquidate her interests in the Far East, of which there is no sign at all, her presence there in strength & her occupation of Vladivostok are permanent factors which will always influence Japan and keep her uneasy'. Cadogan, too, believed that it was only Soviet

<sup>97</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 274 saving, 8 Oct 1936, FO 371/19913/C7072/4/18, minutes, Wigram (9 Oct), Collier (10 Oct) and Sargent (12 Oct).

<sup>98</sup> His minute (20 Oct) on Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to FO, disp 1310, 14 Oct 1936, FO 371/19880/C7262/92/62.

<sup>99</sup> Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to Vansittart, 14 Oct 1936, FO 371/19860/C7983/1/17; Lloyd Thomas to FO, disp 1326, 16 Oct 1936, FO 371/19880/C7389/92/62; Phipps to FO, disp 1097, 12 Oct 1936, FO 371/19880/C7272/92/62, minutes.

<sup>100</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 577, 5 October 1936, FO 371/20341/N5005/20/38, minutes by Labouchere, Vereker (both 14 Oct), Collier (15 Oct) and Vansittart (17 Oct).



military strength that had checked Japan; thus, a Russo-Japanese *rapprochement* was unlikely from Moscow's perspective. However, his speculations about various possibilities in the Far East were instructive:

But I agree that a Japanese-Soviet rapprochement may have serious implications. If it arises from recognition by Japan that she cannot fight Russia, Japanese ambitions may . . . be directed Southward. Would Japan be able to buy off the Soviet and receive a free hand for dealing with China? Hitherto bad Soviet-Japanese relations have certainly acted as a brake in some measure on the Japanese. On the other hand, half of the motive for the policy of encroachment in N. China has been strategic – aimed against Russia. If there is a real Soviet-Japanese détente, might that bring to an end Japan's continual adventures in the north? It is very difficult to answer any of these questions.

It was particularly difficult to do so as a result of Yoshida's initiative.

The Japanese ambassador put forward the idea of an Anglo-Japanese condominium in China, one in which, while British interests were respected, China would be a 'vassal State of Japan'. Orde pointed out its flaws: it would offend public opinion in both Britain and the United States, 'it would be a mistake to bank on Japan respecting British interests in China', China would be 'too big a nut for Japan to crack', and 'a policy of cooperation with Japan which takes the form of looking like encouragement of Japan against Russia will antagonise the latter, weaken her as against Germany and correspondingly strengthen Germany'.<sup>101</sup> These arguments proved decisive, and the British adopted a policy that committed them to nothing that would upset the balance in the Far East.<sup>102</sup> Despite the efforts of Yoshida to invigorate the talks, there was no possibility of his initiative going further in the aftermath of the Keelung affair.<sup>103</sup>

There were other matters. Spain was a major one. After the outbreak of the civil war, the British had attempted to avoid becoming

<sup>101</sup> Following based on Clive to FO, disp 505, 22 Sept 1936, FO 371/20286/F6478/539/23, minutes; T. L. Rowan (Treasury) to Harvey (Eden's private secretary), 26 Oct 1936, FO 371/20279/F6511/89/23, minutes, Orde (30 Oct), Cadogan (29 Oct), Vansittart (30 Oct) and Eden (30 Oct); S. Olu Agbi, 'The Foreign Office and Yoshida's Bid for Rapprochement with Britain in 1936-1937: A Critical Reconsideration of the Anglo-Japanese Conversation', *HJ*, 21, 1 (1978), 173-9. See also Clive to FO, 9 Oct 1936, disp 543, 9 Oct 1936, FO 371/20286/F6607/539/23, minutes.

<sup>102</sup> Clive to FO, tel 318, 3 Nov 1936, FO 371/20279/F6724/89/23. The decision was also pushed by Cadogan: Cadogan diary entries, 29 and 30 Oct 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/5.

<sup>103</sup> The beating by a Japanese policeman of several British sailors on 7 October 1936: see Greg Kennedy, 'The Keelung Incident and Britain's Far Eastern Strategic Foreign Policy, 1936-1937', in Gregory C. Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., *Incidents and International Relations. People, Power and Personalities* (Westport, CT, 2002), 135-58.

involved.<sup>104</sup> On 15 August, they and the French had signed a Non-Intervention Pact, to which Soviet Russia had adhered on 22 August.<sup>105</sup>

British policy was determined by several things: strategic concerns about the sea lanes to the Far East, the stability of French politics and, tied to the latter point, ideological concerns about a possible 'red Spain'.<sup>106</sup> By mid-October, it was evident that Germany, Italy and Soviet Russia were all providing supplies for the belligerents.<sup>107</sup> Some suspected that Soviet policy marked a moving away from the 'Litvinov fabric' of collective security and a return to an 'ideological policy' based on revolution. Collier contended instead that the Soviets were merely 'seek[ing] to reinsure themselves in other quarters, so long as they suspect H[is] M[ajesty's] Govt. and/or the French Government of being ready to leave them to face Hitler unaided'.<sup>108</sup>

On 3 November, Maisky put the Soviet view to Eden. The ambassador argued that Soviet support for the Republicans was 'not due to their desire to set up a Communist régime in that country', but merely to deny a victory to Franco, a victory that would 'bring nearer the day when another active aggression would be committed' by Germany or Italy.

<sup>104</sup> Tom Buchanan, "'A Far Away Country of Which we Know Nothing"? Perceptions of Spain and Its Civil War in Britain, 1931–1939', *TCBH*, 4, 1 (1993), 1–24; Enrique Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936', *EHQ*, 21 (1991), 339–64. On British policy towards Spain, see two articles by Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention: British Policy During the Spanish Civil War', in Peter Catterall with C. J. Morris, eds., *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918–1945* (London and New York, 1993), 94–104, and 'British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain', *CEH*, 1, 2 (1992), 123–37; and two articles by Glyn Stone, 'Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War', *ESR*, 9 (1979), 129–49, and 'Sir Robert Vansittart and Spain 1931–1941', in T. G. Otte and Constantine A. Pagedas, *Personalities, War and Diplomacy. Essays in International History* (London, 1997), 127–57. Soviet policy can be found in Geoffrey Roberts, 'Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War', in Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, eds., *Spain in an International Context, 1936–1959* (New York and Oxford, 1999), 81–104; Denis Smyth, "'We Are with You": Solidarity and Self-interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain, 1936–1939', in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds., *The Republic Besieged. Civil War in Spain 1936–1939* (Edinburgh, 1996), 87–105. The most comprehensive over all examination is Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (London, 1979). My discussion of Spain is based on these sources.

<sup>105</sup> For European reaction see Glyn Stone, 'The European Great Powers and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939', in Robert Boyce and E. M. Robertson, eds., *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1989), 199–232.

<sup>106</sup> David Carlton, 'Eden, Blum, and the Origins of Non-Intervention', *JCH*, 6, 3 (1971), 40–55; Douglas Little, 'Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War', *JCH*, 23 (1988), 291–311.

<sup>107</sup> Vansittart's minute, 16 Oct 1936, on Adm to FO, 15 Oct 1936, FO 371/20580/W13680/9549/41.

<sup>108</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 604, 20 Oct 1936, FO 371/20581/W14276/9459/41, Collier's minute, 6 Nov.

Eden was sceptical, arguing that Maisky 'could hardly be surprised if other people thought differently in view of the declared objective of the upholders of Communism to make their method of Government universal'. Maisky agreed, but contended that universal revolution was an 'ultimate objective but . . . a very distant one'.<sup>109</sup> Eden's suspicions grew with the ongoing reports of Soviet aid to the Republicans as did his irritation with continued public calls in Britain to prevent arms shipments to Spain from Italy and Germany.<sup>110</sup> On 19 November, he made what he termed 'his scarcely veiled allusion to the Soviets' in the House of Commons, in which he stated that there were other governments more to blame for sending supplies to Spain than Germany and Italy.<sup>111</sup>

Eden's statement triggered a *cri de coeur* from Collier. The head of the Northern Department argued that to downplay the Italian and German support for Franco had caused a

growth in Liberal and Labour circles in this country (and not always in those circles only) [of a belief] that the Government have been induced by people who I have heard described as 'Conservatives first and Englishmen afterwards' to adopt a policy of conniving at Signor Mussolini's now avowed policy of spreading Fascism throughout the world as an antidote to communism, and [to seek] to come to an understanding with him which would leave him free to pursue this policy without fear of British opposition.

Collier added that he had always rejected such an interpretation of British policy. He had instead believed that the Foreign Office operated on the principle 'that the ambitions of the three Powers – Italy, Germany and Japan – who are now using anti-Communism as a cloak for their aggressive designs, were much more dangerous to British interests than Communism could ever be'. But the present British policy of trying to work out a Mediterranean agreement with Mussolini made Collier wonder whether this belief was true.

His remarks drew fire from Owen O'Malley, the head of the Southern Department. The latter contended that Mussolini had not 'started the trouble'; rather, it was the long-term policy of the 'Soviet Government or the Third International, whichever we choose to call it' that had initiated the Spanish conflict. Eden's remark, O'Malley argued, had merely 're-dressed' the imbalance in public opinion, in which Soviet Russia had avoided any blame for its equally flagrant violation of the principle of

<sup>109</sup> Eden's conversation with Maisky, 3 Nov 1936, FO 371/20584/W15074/9549/41. Litvinov had earlier evaded the topic: Eden to FO, tel 139, 1 Oct 1936, Eden Papers, FO 954/24.

<sup>110</sup> Minutes, 11 and 12 Nov 1936, FO 371/20585/W15953 and W15884/9549/41.

<sup>111</sup> Eden's minute, 20 Nov 1936, on Adm to FO, 18 Nov 1936, FO 371/20585/W15880/9549/41.

non-intervention. He argued that, as the 'Defence Departments feel very strong [sic]' that an attempt to come to terms with Italy should be made, the British should pursue their 'accepted doctrine that we are not, as a Government, concerned with the constitutional complexion of foreign States, but only with their behaviour towards British interests'. As to the whole process of non-intervention, O'Malley dismissed it as 'largely a piece of humbug, but an extremely useful piece of humbug'.

These were highly political remarks, and Mounsey reacted cautiously. Vansittart was characteristically more outspoken. He blamed all those who had intervened in Spain equally. However, he rejected Collier's remarks about 'Conservatives first and Englishmen afterwards'. 'And who exactly are' such people, Vansittart asked rhetorically, 'and what exactly are they supposed to have done?' Nor did he agree with Collier's remarks about the unacceptability of pursuing Italy. For the PUS, military strength remained the key. 'We simply do not have the wherewithal to face the possibility of trouble on 3 fronts', he asserted, 'and we do owe something to the people of this country in the way of security.'<sup>112</sup> Most importantly, Eden had nailed his flag to a policy of improving relations with Italy at the same time as increasing British strength.<sup>113</sup> However, events in the Far East seemed to make this security even more difficult to attain.

In mid-November 1936, rumours were swirling about a possible German-Japanese grouping.<sup>114</sup> Eden promptly told Yoshida that such an agreement would make any Anglo-Japanese discussions more difficult, an action that the Cabinet approved.<sup>115</sup> But, before the existence of what was to become the Anti-Comintern Pact could be confirmed, there were two important developments that spoke to the impact that such an arrangement might have.<sup>116</sup> One was a long memorandum by Chilston about a possible Soviet-German *rapprochement*. The ambassador argued that, for ideological, economic and 'strategic-political' reasons, such an occurrence was unlikely unless the two countries came to be run by their military authorities. Nor would breakdown of the Franco-Soviet alliance lead to improved Russo-German relations, although 'splendid

<sup>112</sup> Maj. Napier (WO) to FO, 23 Nov 1936, minutes, Collier (24 Nov), O'Malley (30 Nov), Mounsey (1 Dec) and Vansittart (1 Dec).

<sup>113</sup> Eden's minute (nd) on Cranborne's untitled memo, 12 Nov 1936, Cranborne Papers, FO 800/296.

<sup>114</sup> Drummond (Rome) to FO, disp 296, 4 Nov 1936, FO 371/20285/F6849/303/23.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes on Clive to FO, tel 332 immediate, 16 Nov 1936, FO 371/20279/F7014/89/23; minutes, Cab 66(36), 18 Nov 1936, Cab 23/86.

<sup>116</sup> John W. Chapman, 'A Dance on Eggs: Intelligence and the "Anti-Comintern"', *JCH*, 22 (1987), 333-72; Antony Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor. Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936-1941* (London and New York, 1995), 27-9.

isolation' was a possible Soviet response. He did remark, however, that 'there is only one contingency which the Soviet Government really fear: a combined attack by Germany and Japan'. In the Northern Department, Collier found this analysis persuasive, but believed that Soviet 'isolation' would be inimical to British interests. Continuing his long debate with Sargent, Collier contended that, while most might consider 'the prospects of a definite German-Soviet *rapprochement* as decidedly remote',

It does not follow, however, that the abandonment of the Franco-Soviet pact would not, on that account, have serious consequences from our point of view. Even if it only resulted . . . in the abandonment of the Litvinov policy and a return to one of isolation, Germany would be encouraged to pursue her ambitions at the expense of e.g. Czechoslovakia, while the Soviet Government would feel free to 'reinsure themselves' through the Comintern at the expense of all the capitalist Powers, including France and ourselves, and might be tempted to make trouble for us in Asia.

Vansittart merely observed that the German army wished to get rid of the Franco-Soviet Pact in the 'short-term', and 'have in mind the *possibility*' of an arrangement with Soviet Russia in the '*longer range*'.<sup>117</sup>

The second development was a memorandum on Japanese foreign policy. This paper, written on 19 November, aimed at considering 'the prospect of Japan being so far satisfied with the position vis à vis Russia as to be encouraged to strike forcibly in a southern direction'. Since 1932, Orde argued, Soviet Russia had strengthened its military position in the Far East, had sold the diminishing asset of the CER to Japan and had tried to reach an accommodation with Tokyo. Japan's rejection of the latter had meant that Soviet Russia had used force to meet the Japanese border 'pinpricks'. Thus, Orde felt that a German-Japanese *rapprochement* would not end Russo-Japanese hostility. However, it might encourage Japan to risk an attack to the south:

If the United Kingdom and Russia were simultaneously engaged in war with Germany Japan's choice [of whom to attack] would be doubtful. If only one were engaged there could be little doubt that Japan would attack that one. The only safeguard to us will come from the completion of the Singapore Base and the possession of a really strong fleet based upon it.

For Cadogan, this dark analysis had a silver lining. Since a too-strong Russia might push Japan southwards against Britain's interests, the rumoured German-Japanese 'understanding may be a contrary indicator.

<sup>117</sup> Chilton to FO, disp 637, 16 Nov 1936, FO 371/20347/N5715/1837/38, minutes, Collier (25 Nov) and Vansittart (28 Nov), original emphasis.

If so, and from that point of view alone, it may not be entirely disadvantageous to us.<sup>118</sup>

Such thinking underpinned the British response to the Anti-Comintern Pact. Collier was gloomy about the pact; he felt that it foreshadowed a German-Italian-Japanese grouping 'inimical to British interests'. Vansittart shared Collier's view, but Orde, Craigie and, most importantly, Eden, did not. The former pair did not think that there was much in the pact, while the foreign secretary was 'not prepared to take the matter tragically, still less to believe that if we play our cards well the agreement need lead to any closer cooperation between Germany & Japan'. But, the reaction of Soviet Russia also had to be considered.<sup>119</sup>

On 18 November, Maisky stated that Soviet Russia was strong enough to ignore the effects of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Collier accepted that Soviet Russia was strong enough to discourage Japan, but he did not believe that it could deter Germany. Therefore, the result would be that Japan would be 'able to pursue with impunity their present plan of leaving Soviet territory alone . . . concentrating on their offensive against China and, ultimately, against our own interests'. Orde did not believe that either Japan or Germany would be strengthened by the pact, unless there was (which he doubted) 'an important military agreement behind it, as the Russians assert'.<sup>120</sup> He tended to see the pact as a vague anti-communist declaration. Cadogan rejected Collier's contention about the military balance swinging in favour of Japan. 'The German-Japanese Agreement', he wrote, 'though from one point of view it may strengthen Japan, must antagonise Russia and make of her a more uncomfortable neighbour whom it will be difficult to ignore while seeking adventures in other directions'.<sup>121</sup>

There were other unpleasant possibilities. There were rumours that Italy might join the Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>122</sup> This was particularly significant because, at the beginning of November, it had been decided to make an effort to improve Anglo-Italian relations, with an eye towards lessening the strategic difficulties in the Mediterranean.<sup>123</sup> The Admiralty was very

<sup>118</sup> Untitled minute, Orde, 19 Nov 1936, FO 371/20287/F7146/553/23, Cadogan's minute (19 Nov).

<sup>119</sup> His minute (26 Nov) on Clive to FO, tel 348, 25 Nov 1936, FO 371/20285/F7223/303/23.

<sup>120</sup> Craigie's untitled memo, 19 Nov 1936, FO 371/20348/N5866/287/38, minutes.

<sup>121</sup> See also Clive to FO, tel 348, 25 Nov 1936, FO 371/20285/F7223/303/23.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes, Drummond to FO, disp 296, 4 Nov 1936, FO 371/20285/F6849/303/23; Drummond to FO, tel 250, 20 Nov 1936, FO 371/2045/R7041/6851/22.

<sup>123</sup> 'Anglo-Italian Relations', Sargent, 3 Nov 1936, FO 371/20412/R6642/226/22, minutes; Drummond to FO, tel 695, 16 Nov 1936, FO 371/20412/R6867/22, minutes.

much in favour of this idea, and also concerned about the possibility of Italy's joining the Anti-Comintern Pact:

From the purely defence point of view it is not too much to say that, if it is impossible to prevent the formation of an anti-Russian block comprising the three powers mentioned above, it is essential that the British Empire does not become involved in hostilities on the side of Russia.<sup>124</sup>

The latter fear derived from concerns that Britain might be drawn into a war in Europe. Should Germany attack France, and should Soviet Russia and Britain both support that country, 'we may find ourselves engaged in assisting Russia to defeat Germany or in other words co-operate with Russia to reduce Germany and possibly the rest of Europe to Bolshevism'.<sup>125</sup> The reach of the Anti-Comintern Pact was potentially very great.

On 4 December, the Far Eastern Department's view of the Anti-Comintern Pact was ready.<sup>126</sup> The pact was seen as resulting from the Japanese military and the Nazi Party each having outflanked its foreign office.<sup>127</sup> The Japanese required a "big friend" in Europe to 'obtain some reinsurance against the USSR'. Because of Soviet Russia's military strength in the Far East, the Far Eastern Department saw the pact as 'thoroughly ill-advised' for Japan. First, rather than improving Japan's position against Soviet Russia, it 'irritated rather than frightened' Moscow.<sup>128</sup> Second, it could not 'fail to give an impetus to Russian armaments'. Third, it was likely to increase efforts to infiltrate communists into the areas of the Far East that Japan wished to control. Finally, it 'must . . . tend to bring Great Britain and the United States closer together in the Far East', to Japan's detriment. The Germans had hoped to do two things: to gain an ally against Soviet Russia and to use the pact as a lever to force Britain to join with them in an anti-communist bloc. The latter was unlikely, for the pact 'has done little to persuade this country that an anti-communist crusade is either desirable or necessary'.

Therefore, the results for Britain were unpleasant but not fatal. Since the 'suspicion of Japanese policy and Japanese designs becomes mixed

<sup>124</sup> Adm to FO, 21 Nov 1936, FO 371/20412/R4974/226/22, minutes.

<sup>125</sup> 'Imperial Conference 1937 – Chiefs of Staff Review of Imperial Defence', JIC 16, 17 Nov 1936, Cab 56/2.

<sup>126</sup> This and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on untitled memo, secret, FED (with ND and CD), 4 Dec 1936, FO 371/20286/F7504/303/23. The text of the pact likely was obtained from code-breaking (Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, 28).

<sup>127</sup> For Germany see John P. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis 1931–1938. A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology* (Oxford, 1982), 175–208; for Japan, Carl Boyd, 'The Berlin–Tokyo Axis and Japanese Military Initiative', *MAS*, 15, 2 (1981), 311–38.

<sup>128</sup> Clive to FO, tel 368, 12 Dec 1936, FO 371/20286/F7650/303/23.



up with suspicion of German policy and German designs' due to the Anti-Comintern Pact, 'a new disquieting factor [had been] introduced into international politics'. More directly, Soviet Russia had immediately announced a new naval building programme, which would affect German construction plans and endanger the Anglo-German Naval Agreement.<sup>129</sup> However, the likelihood of increased Russo-Japanese tension and a possible warming of Anglo-American relations made the Anti-Comintern Pact much less unpalatable than would otherwise have been the case.<sup>130</sup>

The Foreign Office continued to explore the details of the Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>131</sup> However, of much greater significance was the future of Franco-Soviet relations, something also entwined with British defence policy. On 8 December, Vansittart warned the prominent French right-wing politician Paul Reynaud that advocating transforming the Franco-Soviet Pact 'at least to some extent into the reality which at present it is not' would have a 'mixed reception' in Britain and be seized upon by the Germans as their excuse for not joining the five-power talks.<sup>132</sup> Reynaud took Vansittart's point, but added that Soviet support was needed because Britain's 'military power' was 'practically non-existent'.<sup>133</sup> Eden rejected this assertion – 'What rubbish!' he wrote in the margin. He argued that the Royal Navy was 'by far the best' in Europe and the Royal Air Force would be better than its French equivalent in 1937, although he conceded that the army – 'never a principal factor in British aid' – was not up to the standards of 1914. But this latter point was the key. Vansittart pointed out that the French 'count, & always will count, on us for a substantial supply of *ground-troops*' and that, if Britain were unable to provide them 'we shall not be able to keep on close terms with the French – and so shall drift toward isolation'.<sup>134</sup> Here, the PUS was

<sup>129</sup> Craigie's (15 and 19 Dec) and Oliphant's (9 and 17 Dec) minutes on Chilston to FO, disp 683, 1 December 1936, FO 371/20344/N6018/58/38; minutes on Adm to FO, 9 Dec 1936, FO 371/371/20354/N6142/5205/38; arms-limitation context is in Greg Kennedy, 'Becoming Dependent'.

<sup>130</sup> Intimate Anglo-American discussions of the pact and Japanese initiatives soon followed; see Cadogan's conversations with Ray Atherton (counsellor, US embassy, London), 17 Dec 1936, FO 371/20286/F7926/303/23, and 13 Mar 1937, FO 371/21029/F1633/28/23; Cadogan diary entry, 16 Dec 1936, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/5.

<sup>131</sup> Chilston to Orde, 28 Dec 1936, FO 371/21828/F26/26/23; Chilston to Orde, 25 Jan 1937, FO 371/21828/F634/26/23.

<sup>132</sup> Vansittart's talk with Reynaud, 8 Dec 1936, FO 371/19916/C8892/4/18, Eden's marginalia and minute (nd, but c. 10 Dec), Vansittart's minute (11 Dec); Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, 236–7.

<sup>133</sup> Likely prompted by pressure from the French Communist Party to put military teeth in the Franco-Soviet Pact: Charles (Brussels) to FO, tel 64 saving, 16 Dec 1936, FO 371/19860/C8983/1/17.

<sup>134</sup> Based on archival sources in n. 133.



opposing Neville Chamberlain's attempt in the Cabinet to limit the size of the British army in any potential role on the continent.<sup>135</sup> The result of the chancellor's effort, Vansittart warned Eden, was that it would be 'impossible . . . to retain any continental confidence' in the value of Britain as an ally; Britain risked 'receding into impotent isolation'.<sup>136</sup> But Vansittart's advice was so unpalatable that Eden made yet another attempt to send the PUS to Paris.<sup>137</sup>

Frustrated by the direction of policy and worried about his own position, Vansittart penned a long memorandum outlining his views on 'The World Situation and British Rearmament', and circulated it to Hankey, Chatfield and the various departments in the Foreign Office. It was partly a reiteration of his anti-German DRC position. However, it was also a comprehensive examination of British strategic foreign policy and the problems facing it, which meant that Soviet Russia was never far from the PUS's thoughts. In the Far East, Vansittart argued that, due to the increased strength of the Soviets, the Japanese had 'now lost any stomach for armed adventure against Russia, save with iron companions and golden opportunity'. This 'deadlock' was to Britain's advantage, and 'any easement is to our loss', for, if the Japanese became convinced that Soviet Russia were impenetrable, 'the aside of southward aggression [against British interests] may be as likely drama as an attack on bristling Russia despite the doctrinal mouthings of mid-stage'. Vansittart argued that the significance of the Anti-Comintern Pact was that it 'clearly . . . introduce[d] Japan into the orbit of European affairs at a particularly delicate and dangerous phase, and . . . increase[d] the probability that, in given circumstances, Germany and Japan would now act together'.

What might this mean for Soviet Russia? Vansittart had several thoughts. The first was that the Anti-Comintern Pact

may have the effect of containing and paralysing Russia in the event of German aggression in Europe . . . on the other hand, it cannot be assumed that the arrangement is such as to preclude the prospect of further *détente* between Russia

<sup>135</sup> Minutes, Cab 75(36), 16 Dec 1936, Cab 23/86; 'The Role of the British Army', CP 336(36), N. Chamberlain, 11 Dec 1936, Cab 24/265; Vansittart's minutes (14 Dec) in FO 371/19882/C9094/6761/62 and FO 371/19882/C9096/6761/62. This was part of an ongoing debate about possible Belgian neutrality: Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), 232–42; Peter Dennis, *Decision by Default. Peacetime Conscription and British Defence 1919–1939* (London, 1972), 81–99.

<sup>136</sup> His minute (8 Jan 1937) on CP 2(37), 'The Role of the British Army and Its Equipment', CP 2(37), Duff Cooper, Cab 24/267, FO 371/2071/C205/205/62.

<sup>137</sup> Hankey to Phipps and reply, 23 and 29 Dec 1936, Phipps Papers, PHPP 3/3; Eden to Baldwin, 27 Dec 1936 and 8 Jan 1937, Avon Papers, AP 13/1/48H and AP 14/1/641B; Cadogan diary entry, 11 Jan 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6. Vansittart lobbied Baldwin to remain as PUS; see Michael Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934–1937* (Westport, CT, 1997), 137–8.

and Japan. On this treacherous and speculative position we can but keep a close watch; and our only security will be the quick completion of the Singapore base and a strong fleet.

The second was the possibility that Soviet Russia, 'still a merchant of "dangerous thoughts"', might move 'toward the hoity-toity, if not splendid, isolation with which at intervals she threatens the West'. The PUS also believed that Germany's anti-Bolshevik crusade was 'one of the best-staged feints in history' and that there were substantial forces that favoured a *rapprochement* between the two states. Thus, although the Franco-Soviet Pact as it stood at present was 'still a scarecrow stuffed with straw . . . politically it offers scope for dark sayings on dark nights, and politically all Germans are determined to lynch it'. This was the German view, but 'Russia, in fact, is not at present tempted. The itch is in some German and not Russian palms; but its presence in hands now loudest to applaud any hostile reference to the Franco-Soviet Pact measures the sincerity of the cry.'

For the PUS, Spain was a dangerous sideshow. He hoped that the struggle might push Italy and Germany apart. His position on the struggle itself was not shaped by ideological considerations, but by Britain's interests:

It is ironically true that . . . the victory of the Right would be no worse for us than the victory of the Left – a very extreme Left – which would spread a dividing and disintegrating contagion into France and from France to ourselves, and would so alter the European kaleidoscope as to present Germany with hegemony ready made. On the other hand, if Franco wins, the now combined weight of the two larger autocrats . . . will be too great for him . . . We shall then be faced by at least a temporarily working combination of dictators, major, minor and minimus.

In line with this, Vansittart castigated the 'Soviet government, which seems lately bereft of statesmanship or even card-sense, . . . [as being] largely responsible for making Spain the scene and cause of the bloodiest form of that very ideological struggle that we are seeking to prevent'. Vansittart's advice remained what it had always been: the need to make '*a really impressive display of strength on our part*' and to work hard on 'manufacturing Time', at least until 1939 when rearmament might allow Britain to 'breathe with even comparative relief, although much will remain to be taken in hand'. How to manufacture time? Vansittart advocated keeping the German 'tiger sweet' for two years with colonial and tariff concessions. But the PUS also emphasized the need to explain the British actions very carefully, lest sweetening the tiger be mistaken for weakness and appeasement, especially in the United States: 'any unwise assistance to potential men of prey would alienate Franklin

Roosevelt the Second – who may be a person very different from Franklin Roosevelt the First – and so compromise any chance that we might have of finding a way round the disaster of the American neutrality legislation'.<sup>138</sup>

The views of Hankey and Chatfield on this document are instructive. The former attributed the bulk of Britain's woes to two things: the deplorable state of its armaments and the difficulties involved in 'our strong adherence to the ideals of the League of Nations, disarmament and the so-called collective security'. Hankey advocated using foreign policy to avoid war. This required being 'more cautious in our League of Nations policy . . . . We ought to place our interests before the idealism of the Covenant.' Of the four possible policy alternatives – co-operation with the 'Dictator Powers', the 'encirclement' of Germany, a 'defensive alliance with France' and 'to remain "on the hedge", as friendly as possible with all' – Hankey championed taking the latter, 'even if it is not very heroic'.

His rejection of the other alternatives spoke directly to Soviet Russia. Co-operation with the dictators might improve relations with Germany, but, as for those who argued 'that Russia, with its sinister propaganda, is more dangerous than Germany, that France is falling under Russian influence to a dangerous degree, and that Germany is the main protection against Bolshevism', Hankey was dismissive. Such arguments, he contended, were 'cynical, selfish . . . out of keeping with the spirit of the times and not likely to prove acceptable to the British people'. Hankey did not favour an 'encirclement' of Germany via alliances. His reasons included his distrust of Soviet Russia. 'Italy and Russia', he wrote, 'would be unreliable members. Russia might even be foremost in provoking a rupture and then standing out, with the object of promoting the extension through the warring nations of the principles of the Third International.' Besides, it 'would be very difficult to induce our own people to accept such a commitment or to fulfil it if the occasion arose in Central or Eastern Poland. The policy would put a great strain on the Dominions'.<sup>139</sup>

Chatfield took a more pessimistic view.<sup>140</sup> Earlier in December, at meetings of both the COS and CID, he had emphasized Britain's

<sup>138</sup> 'The World Situation and British Rearmament', most secret, Vansittart, 31 Dec 1936, FO 371/20467/W18855/18355/50, original emphasis.

<sup>139</sup> 'The World Situation and Rearmament. Some remarks on Sir Robert Vansittart's Memorandum', Hankey, 21 Dec 1936, Cab 21/541.

<sup>140</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on 'Anglo-German Naval Treaty', Chatfield, 25 Dec 1936, FO 800/394. Internal evidence makes clear that this is Chatfield's response; the more aptly titled versions ('Notes by the First Sea Lord on Sir Robert Vansittart's Memorandum on the World Situation and Re-armament,

'present unpreparedness for war' and called on the Foreign Office to 'diminish our chances of getting involved'.<sup>141</sup> Now, the Chief of the Naval Staff argued that Britain had 'no friends we can trust'. Yet Britain was threatened both in Europe and in the Far East. 'To fight two such wars is really something we should not contemplate', he wrote, '[i]t must not happen'. His solution was simple, and in line with what he had argued at the DRC. The greatest calamity would be 'to be involved in war with Japan before Germany has struck her blow', because this would mean that Germany's 'line of attack would be taken without regard to us and might well be initially in the west of Europe'. Therefore, an 'understanding' with Japan was needed. Even this would not 'give us the right to be involved in war in Europe because it would not stand the strain'. Instead, a Japanese arrangement would support Hankey's policy of hedge sitting, with the provision that Britain would go to war in Europe only for its 'vital interests'. These Chatfield defined as an attack on 'France, Belgium or Holland. If Germany, realising this, tries to expand to the South East, we must accept it. Europe must work out its own salvation in that quarter.'

Chatfield did not mention Soviet Russia, but the implications of his remarks were plain, and clearly hostile to any idea that Britain should become committed in eastern Europe by virtue of complications arising from the Franco-Soviet Pact. But, as Vansittart gently pointed out to Chatfield, the admiral's remarks neither considered the effect that such a policy would have on France nor comprehended that allowing Germany to expand in eastern Europe would result in Berlin's establishing a position "*that will eventually overwhelm us*".<sup>142</sup> Further, the PUS pointed out that an arrangement with Japan would be difficult, due both to the conflicting interests of Tokyo and London and to public opinion in Britain.

These speculations did not end discussion of the Franco-Soviet Pact. In mid-January 1937, Chilston reported that the Soviet press now argued that the Franco-Soviet Pact 'sprang from Soviet zeal to protect the Western democracies'.<sup>143</sup> On 26 January, Chilston wrote to Collier,

and on the comment thereon by Sir Maurice Hankey', most secret, 5 Jan 1937) in Cab 21/541 and Chatfield Papers, CHT 3/1, are derivative.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes, 189th meeting COS, 9 Dec 1936, Cab 53/6; minutes, 285th meeting CID, 10 Dec 1936, Cab 2/6. See also 'Position of Belgium in the Proposed Five-Power Conference', CID B-1287, COS, 25 Nov 1936 and 'Position of Belgium in the Proposed Five-Power Conference', CID B-1288, Eden, 3 Dec 1936, both Cab 4/25.

<sup>142</sup> Vansittart to Chatfield, 1 Jan 1937, FO 800/395, original emphasis. Vansittart was quoting Chatfield.

<sup>143</sup> The minute (18 Jan) by Falla, on Chilston to FO, tel 9, 16 Jan 1937, FO 371/21103/N272/272/38.

commenting on the belief that the French saw the real significance of the Franco-Soviet Pact as being that it prevented Soviet Russia 'from falling into the arms of Germany'.<sup>144</sup> The ambassador reiterated his opinion that a German-Soviet *rapprochement* was unlikely, but speculated as to whether the Franco-Soviet alliance on its own would prevent such an occurrence. In his view, it would not, just as the 1926 Treaty of Berlin had not prevented the Franco-Soviet Pact and the Franco-Polish alliance had not prevented the Polish-German Treaty of 1934. The Franco-Soviet Pact also was unpopular with the Poles, who felt that it made keeping Soviet Russia at arm's length more difficult. Further, Chilston opined that the only relationship that was 'even remotely possible' at present was 'some sort of collaboration *on equal terms* between the Reichswehr and the Red Army'.<sup>145</sup>

Collier's draft reply renewed his ongoing quarrel with Orme Sargent. The latter queried Collier's assumptions, including that the Germans disliked the Franco-Soviet Pact because 'it is an outward and visible sign to the world that the Soviet Government are on the French side in defence of the territorial *status quo* in Europe'. Any reply, the superintending undersecretary argued, should not reflect just Collier's views, but should be based on 'the considered opinion of the Foreign Office'. While Oliphant, who directly supervised Collier, agreed with Sargent's contentions, Vansittart did not. However, it was decided to suspend Collier's draft until comment was received from those who had received copies of Chilston's letter.

This occurred in March and April. In Paris, the British ambassador, George Clerk, agreed that the Franco-Soviet Pact had been concluded to prevent Soviet Russia's drift towards Germany. But he felt that the French were not 'so innocent' as to believe that the existence of the pact would prevent Soviet Russia from a *rapprochement* with Germany if it suited Soviet interests. In Warsaw, Chilston's view that the Poles disliked the Franco-Soviet Pact was accepted, and this dislike was thought to rest on three pillars: first, the pact gave Soviet Russia more influence in eastern Europe; second, it threatened the Poles with 'the old bogey of the possible passage of Soviet forces across Polish territory' and, third, it diminished Poland's value (compared to that of Soviet Russia) as a French ally. In Berlin, Phipps noted that, while the Reichswehr would

<sup>144</sup> The remainder of this paragraph and the following one, except where indicated, are based on Warner (minister, Berne) to FO, disp 532, 18 Dec 1936, FO 371/20346/N6375/136/38; Chilston to Collier, 26 Jan 1937, FO 371/21094/N546/45/38, minutes and attachments.

<sup>145</sup> Similar information was received from Latvia; Monson (minister, Riga) to Collier, 19 Jan 1937, FO 371/21104/N461/461/38.

like a warming of relations with the Soviets, the Nazis would not.<sup>146</sup> Although Sargent thus found that there was wide support for Collier's views, the former still suggested that a joint memorandum be drawn up at the Foreign Office. The result was produced in late May.<sup>147</sup>

While these arguments were being made, other aspects of the Franco-Soviet Pact continued to be discussed. French efforts to strengthen the Little Entente and to improve Czech-Polish relations were intimately linked to Soviet Russia. A greater warmth between Prague and Warsaw would mean that the latter could possibly be drawn into a quarrel with Germany, something that Poland was unwilling to risk. For the British, there was a similar danger. This meant, as O'Malley argued, that it 'is therefore in our interest to limit French commitments in Central Europe as severely as possible'. Sargent agreed. For him, the anti-German purport of the French initiative was clear, and its ramifications for British policy manifest:

There can be no doubt that, although neither Germany nor Russia are mentioned therein, the proposed pact would be held both in Germany and throughout Europe as constituting the final link in the chain of French alliances across Europe from Paris to Moscow. On this ground it would certainly be the death blow to any possibility of a new Locarno.<sup>148</sup>

Again, too, there was the legacy of the First World War. The French initiative would, according to Sargent, mean that 'one of the Great Powers would once again be pledged to interfere in the internal quarrels of the Balkan States. We have consistently endeavoured to prevent such a return to the old bad habits of the pre-war period.' In these circumstances, Sargent argued that the British were 'entitled, in view of the guarantee we have given her [France], to exercise a definite control over her policy in the East of Europe'. Britain had 'unwillingly' accepted the Franco-Soviet Pact, but now must oppose any extension of Paris's commitments. Such thinking met with unanimous agreement from Cadogan, Vansittart and Eden, no doubt also influenced by the fact that Romania also was opposed to the French plans because they inevitably would mean that

<sup>146</sup> Clerk (ambassador, Paris) to Collier, 9 Mar 1937, FO 371/21094/N1522/45/38; Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to Sargent, 6 Apr 1937, FO 371/21094/N1899/45/38; Kennard (minister, Warsaw) to Collier, 6 Apr 1937, FO 371/21095/N1926/45/38 and Phipps (ambassador, Berlin) to Collier, 7 Apr 1937, FO 371/21095/N1934/45/38, minutes.

<sup>147</sup> 'Summary of Recent Correspondence on the Value of the Franco-Soviet Pact', Falla, 27 May, FO 371/21095/N3129/45/38.

<sup>148</sup> Eden's talk with the French ambassador, 7 Jan 1936, FO 371/21136/R189/26/67, minutes; minutes, O'Malley (head, Southern Department, on 25 Jan), Sargent, Cadogan, Vansittart (all 29 Jan) and Eden (nd), on de Margerie (French embassy, London) to Sargent, 21 Jan 1936, FO 371/21136/R501/26/67.

Bucharest would 'be compelled to allow the Soviet Government to send troops across Roumanian territory to the assistance of Czechoslovakia'.<sup>149</sup>

By February, the likelihood of any five-power, new Locarno agreement was rapidly fading.<sup>150</sup> Both this and the effect of the Franco-Soviet Pact were reflected in military discussions. At the CID on 11 February, Vansittart dilated on the 'improbability' of any five-power agreement coming about and noted the growing warmth between Rome and Berlin. This might lead to France's 'isolation' to the detriment of Britain. The PUS and the COS both advocated increases in armaments to ensure Britain's safety. However, the latter also noted their concern lest London be 'drawn in [to a European war] on account of our being linked with France, a country who was largely bound by pacts with other countries in east and south-east Europe'. Therefore, they wished to be given an indication as to the future direction of British foreign policy.<sup>151</sup>

However, the COS had also remarked on the growing strength of the Soviet military forces. Could this increase serve to undermine their concerns about the Franco-Soviet Pact, by suggesting that the latter might serve as a deterrent to Germany and Japan? The answer was equivocal.<sup>152</sup> If Britain and France were to go to war with Germany and Italy, then Soviet help would be useful only if Poland were also a belligerent. And, if Soviet Russia's participation brought in Japan, then the naval situation would be made much worse for the RN, a point that Hoare was careful to make in Cabinet when the subject was discussed.<sup>153</sup> None the less, the COS concluded that a fear of Soviet intervention was a 'powerful moral deterrent' to Germany's going to war. Soviet power had always to be considered. But this only added to the complexity of British strategic foreign policy, rather than solving the question of what the Franco-Soviet Pact meant for that policy.

In the meantime, the idea of a general agreement had not died, and the Franco-Soviet Pact continued to be central to its discussion. At the Foreign Policy Committee on 10 March, a further discussion occurred.

<sup>149</sup> Sargent's minute (29 Jan) on British Delegation (Eden) to FO, tel 6, 23 Jan 1937, FO 371/21136/R530/26/67.

<sup>150</sup> Vansittart's minute on Ingram (Rome) to FO, tel 64, 28 Jan 1937, FO 371/20705/C689/1/18; minute, Sargent (8 Feb) on an untitled General Staff memo, 30 Jan 1937, FO 371/20738/C1142/72/18.

<sup>151</sup> Minutes, 288th meeting CID, 11 Feb 1937, Cab 2/6; final version is 'Review of Imperial Defence by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', CID 1305-B, Chatfield, Ellington and Deverell, 22 Feb 1937, Cab 4/25.

<sup>152</sup> 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at May 1937', COS 551, Chatfield, Ellington, Deverell, 9 Feb 1937, Cab 53/30.

<sup>153</sup> Minutes, Cab 9(37), 24 Feb 1937, Cab 23/87.

Halifax, the Lord Privy Seal, wanted to 'outflank the real difficulty – the Franco-Soviet Pact', by persuading Germany to sign a series of multi-lateral pacts with neighbouring east European states. To allow this to occur, Eden asserted, Germany would insist that Britain must ensure that the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet Pacts 'were dissolved'. Chamberlain entered the fray, arguing that Halifax's proposal for Germany should be matched by Soviet Russia's signing similar agreements. This proposal was perilously close to the Eastern Pact that had failed to materialize when Simon was foreign secretary, and he (now home secretary) warned that Britain should not get involved in 'discussions on the Franco-Soviet quagmire'.<sup>154</sup>

However, no matter what the British preferred, the initiative about the five-power agreement lay with the Germans. In March, their response was unavailing, except on terms inimical to British interests. William Strang, the new head of the Central Department, pointed out that the Germans aimed at 'weakening and destroying the principle of collective action against aggression and its application through the Covenant'.<sup>155</sup> Combined with this, Germany aspired to dismantle France's eastern European alliances and curb the reciprocal Anglo-French security guarantees. This threw cold water on the Foreign Policy Committee. On 18 March, Eden remarked that 'the chances of reaching agreement for a basis of a Five Power Pact were very small indeed', although the possibility of appeasing Germany by means of colonial concessions was not yet abandoned.<sup>156</sup>

The Soviet government viewed all of this warily, stating that any attempt to weaken the Little Entente was unacceptable, earning them the sobriquet of being "bloc" mad'.<sup>157</sup> Equally, Moscow was unhappy about the tepid French attachment to the Franco-Soviet Pact.<sup>158</sup> Such a rebuke had its impact, and the French decided in mid-May that discussions between Soviet and French military attachés would be held in order to give at least the appearance of substance to the Franco-Soviet Pact. This was resented by the British.<sup>159</sup> And all these considerations of agreements and arrangements were complicated by repeated rumours

<sup>154</sup> FP(36), minutes 6th meeting, 10 Mar 1937, Cab 27/622.

<sup>155</sup> Strang's analysis (15 Mar) on Phipps to FO, tel 264, 12 Mar 1937, FO 371/20706/C2021/1/18.

<sup>156</sup> FP(36), minutes 7th meeting, 18 Mar 1937, Cab 27/622.

<sup>157</sup> Minute (14 Apr), Ross (Southern Department) on MacKillop to FO, tel 10, 7 Apr 1937, FO 371/21137/R2497/26/67.

<sup>158</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 227, 4 May 1937, FO 371/20696/C3439/1127/17; Chilston to FO, tel 19, 5 May 1937, FO 371/23593/C3490/523/62.

<sup>159</sup> Vansittart's conversation with Léger, 13 May 1937, FO 371/23593/C3620/532/62, Eden's minute (15 May).



that a Soviet–German *rapprochement*, spearheaded by their respective military leaders (there were even reports of a possible coup by the Red Army), was imminent. While there was scepticism about this at the Foreign Office, where it was suspected either that the Soviets had launched this rumour to put pressure on the French or that the Germans had initiated it to threaten London, it was evident that Soviet Russia could not be ignored in the formulation of British strategic foreign policy.<sup>160</sup>

This was driven home in naval arms control talks. In May 1936, the Soviets had made it clear that, in any Anglo-Soviet naval agreement, Moscow would reserve the right to build a fleet sufficient to defend its possessions in the Far East. This became involved with the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. If Soviet Russia were to build the large cruisers it contended were necessary to deter Japan, Germany would build in kind. The delicate Anglo-German balance would be upset. The Germans used the Franco-Soviet Pact as a weapon, arguing that the French and Soviet fleets should be considered as one. Hard bargaining ensued for the next eight months.

In the Foreign Office there were divisions. Craigie and the Admiralty were insistent on the paramount need to maintain the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, at whatever expense to Anglo-Soviet relations. Collier believed that to accept this would mean allowing a fear of German displeasure to control British policy. But, however this debate played out in London, it could not influence Soviet policy. The Soviets were insistent about their needs, and resolved to build a strong fleet. The matter came to a head on 8 March 1937 when Moscow stated that it would refuse to sign any agreement. After a week's consternation, during which Craigie and Eden reviled the Soviet government, Moscow changed course and agreed to a settlement, which was signed in early July.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Chilston to Collier, 26 Jan 1937, FO 371/21094/N546/45/38; Phipps to Sargent, 16 Feb 1937, FO 371/20709/C144/3/18; Phipps to FO, disp 221, 1 Mar 1937, FO 371/21095/N1224/46/38; Chilston to FO, disp 106, 9 Mar 1937, FO 371/21095/N1397/46/38; Phipps to FO, tel 242, 13 Apr 1937, FO 371/21095/N2064/45/38; Ogilvie-Forbes (Berlin) to FO, tel 255, 19 Apr 1937, FO 371/21095/N2122/46/38; Chilston to Collier, 20 Apr 1937, FO 371/21095/N2212/46/38.

<sup>161</sup> Read in conjunction with Greg Kennedy, 'Becoming Dependent'. The German context is in Maiolo, *Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 47–56; David K. Varey, 'The Politics of Naval Aid: The Foreign Office, the Admiralty, and Anglo-Soviet Technical Co-operation, 1936–1937', *D&S*, 14, 4 (2003), 50–68. Jürgen Rohwer and Mikhail S. Monakov, *Stalin's Ocean-Going Fleet. Soviet Naval Strategy and Shipbuilding Programmes 1935–1953* (London, 2001), 221–4; Lennart Samuelson, 'The Naval Dimensions of the Soviet Five-Year Plans, 1925–1941', in William M. McBride, ed., *New Interpretations in Naval History* (Annapolis, MD, 1998), 221–4; Samuelson, *Plans for Stalin's War Machine. Tukhachevskii and Military-Economic Planning, 1925–1941* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 176–83.

What did this naval incident demonstrate? First, but least significantly, it served as another in the series of irritants between London and Moscow that made co-operation between the two difficult. The British found the Soviets difficult negotiators, inconsistent in their positions and often unwilling to consider what the British felt were the wider aspects of the discussions. Second, and related to this last matter, the Anglo-Soviet naval discussions showed that, since Soviet Russia had decided to end its self-imposed exclusion from Great Power relations and to put its actual and potential military strength in the scales of the international balance of power, it could not be ignored in the formulation of British strategic foreign policy. No policy with respect to Germany or Japan could be made without considering Moscow, and the latter was unwilling to act as a British puppet in any way.

This was evident in the Far East. While the British had dealt with the naval negotiations and pondered the significance of the Franco-Soviet Pact, other matters also had moved on. By the beginning of March 1937, with the end of the Keelung incident in sight and the appointment of Satō Naotake as Japanese foreign minister, there was optimism that Anglo-Japanese relations could improve.<sup>162</sup> From China, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British ambassador to China, outlined a plan whereby this could come about.<sup>163</sup> As 'no Sino-Japanese understanding is possible without Russian participation', Knatchbull-Hugessen suggested that a Sino-Soviet-Japanese arrangement might be worked out. China would be relieved of Japanese pressure, Japan could have its fears about Soviet Russia diminished and Moscow 'might regard settlement of the more acute Far-Eastern problems as a desirable set off to [the] recent German-Japanese agreement'. And, of course, British interests would also be met.

Response at the Foreign Office emphasized the complexity of the situation, the role of Soviet Russia and its links to Europe. Pratt argued that the Kwantung army would not agree to any frontier settlements in the north acceptable to the Soviets. Soviet Russia had 'very little to gain' from any such agreement, since its 'military position in Eastern Siberia is

<sup>162</sup> Clive to FO, disp 151, 17 Mar 1937, FO 371/21040/F2116/414/23, minutes; Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942* (London, 1977), 216–17.

<sup>163</sup> The remainder of this and the following four paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on Knatchbull-Hugessen to Cadogan, tel 59, 2 Mar 1937, FO 371/21024/F1325/597/61, minutes, Pratt (8 Mar), Orde (9 Mar), Collier (10 Mar), Baxter (11 Mar), Strang (12 Mar), Sargent (15 Mar), Cadogan (17 Mar) and Eden (21 Mar). A memo (by Orde) outlining the results of these minutes was sent to Clive and Chilton for their comments; see also Knatchbull-Hugessen to Cadogan, 3 Mar 1937, Knatchbull-Hugessen Papers, KNAT 2/51.

now very strong . . . and the frontier squabbles do not worry her unduly'. Orde put the focus squarely on '*whether the suggested détente would really be advantageous to ourselves*'. He argued that it would not. If Japan were secure in the north, it might attack in the south. 'I am inclined to suggest, therefore, that it is undesirable to promote a *real* détente unless it covers Russia and unless the situation vis-a-vis Germany makes it of real importance that Russia should be enabled, and in fact brought, to transfer considerable forces from the Far East to the West.'

This introduction of Europe moved discussion to the Northern Department, where Collier contended that such an agreement might be of value to Moscow, but only if Japan removed the bulk of its troops from North China. This would allow the Soviets to shift their forces to Europe, which would be 'well worth while from the point of view of our interests' there. In the Central Department, Baxter doubted that an increase in Soviet strength in Europe 'would really make for peace and security . . . or that it would necessarily act as a deterrent to German ambitions'. For him, in a remark that spoke directly to the concurrent imbroglio in the naval arms control talks, the principal advantage to any agreement in the Far East was that 'it is in that direction, in that direction alone, that we can hope to bring about any world-wide agreement for the limitation of armaments'. Everything was connected. 'We can hardly hope that Germany would agree to any effective measure of arms limitation unless Russia would agree to some similar limitation, and Russia would not agree without Japan.'

Others were more Machiavellian. Strang struck an icy note of *Realpolitik*, arguing that promoting such a détente was antithetical to British interests:

Placed as we are, with pledges in all parts of the world, we fare best, it seems to me, when our potential enemies are in a state of mild friction with other Powers; when relations between them are bad enough for them to keep an eye on each other, but not bad enough to threaten a disturbance of the peace. In particular, it is surely a mercy that in our present state of weakness, both Germany and Japan are on bad terms with Russia.

Sargent 'fully agree[d]' with Strang, and, in a statement that cut across the grain of those who believed in the style of international relations promoted by the League, contended that '[i]t can just as well be argued that, in the long view, a nicely constructed system of checks and balances is equally more likely to serve the cause of peace'. Could a return to old diplomacy be far behind? Cadogan also concurred. He preferred working for a Sino-Japanese détente on grounds acceptable to Britain. As to Soviet Russia, he echoed Strang: 'I share the views of those who

think it all to the good that Japan should not be freed of her apprehensions as regards Russia.' And, in a passage that Eden underlined in red to indicate his approval, Cadogan noted that he was not 'quite convinced' that any increase in Soviet power in Europe 'would be altogether desirable'.

Eden preferred a different constellation of Powers in the Far East. 'I had rather detach Tokyo from Berlin', the foreign secretary wrote, 'as a result of improved Anglo-Japanese relations than seek to improve Russo-Japanese relations which might not in the end result in separating Tokyo from Berlin, but in freeing Tokyo to work with Berlin against us in a new sphere.' 'The triangle for us to work', he concluded, 'is ourselves, Japan & China, with USA constantly in touch.' In Tokyo, Clive also disagreed.<sup>164</sup> Events, combined with previous Japanese rebuffs of Soviet offers of a non-aggression pact, had 'obligingly relegated into the background the nightmare, for British interests of a German-Russian or Japanese-Russian understanding'. In fact, he 'believe[d] that the fatuity of alienating the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America simultaneously has now dawned on the Japanese Army'. Moscow was not in favour of improved relations between Britain and Japan. Their position was a mirror image of that which Strang had contended should be Britain's: 'naturally . . . [the Soviets] desire the worst possible relations between the British Empire and the Japanese; they would like us to fight their battles for them by restraining Japan economically and they dread the possibility of an Anglo-Japanese *entente*'. This view was widespread. Eden in fact told the newly created Defence Plans (Policy) Committee on 19 April that Soviet Russia would 'probably not be adverse to seeing other Powers at loggerheads'.<sup>165</sup>

The assumption of Soviet strength was battered in the late spring and early summer of 1937, as purges swept through the Red Army.<sup>166</sup> Initially, the rumours of arrests and executions were not viewed unfavourably in London. Also, it was hard to determine what was happening in the Red Army, for in mid-May there were a number of appointments that seemed to indicate that a number of high-ranking

<sup>164</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Clive to FO, disp 152, 17 Mar 1937, FO 371/21040/F2117/414/23 and Clive to FO, disp 165, 25 Mar 1937, FO 371/21024/F2368/597/61. See also 'Appreciation of the probable plans of Operations and initial deployment in a Russo-Japanese War', secret, MI2(c), 23 Apr 1937, WO 106/5499; Chilston, disp 232, 11 May 1937, FO 371/21025/F2970/597/61.

<sup>165</sup> DP(P), minutes 1st meeting, 19 Apr 1937, Cab 16/181.

<sup>166</sup> John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command. A Military-Political History 1918-1941* (London, 1962), 440-73 504-9 and David R. Jones, 'Motives and Consequences of the Red Army Purges, 1937-1938', *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, 3 (1979), 256-64.

officers (including M. N. Tukhachevsky) who had been previously thought to be under suspicion, had been exonerated. But, at the same time, there was evidence of increased control of the military by the Communist Party. Military councils had been set up in the various Soviet military districts, and military commissars had been appointed in all units. 'It is very hard to estimate the effect of these measures', Vereker noted in London, 'one can but hope that the Red Army discipline will not be adversely affected'.<sup>167</sup>

By the beginning of June, however, it was becoming clear that Stalin and the Communist Party were determined to ensure that 'the prospects of the Red Army becoming the master instead of the Servant of the Soviet State are now even more remote than they were'. Collier quickly saw the political significance of this: 'it seems clear that, in the army at least, it is not "Trotskyism" which Stalin fears, so much as independence of any sort'.<sup>168</sup> By the middle of the month, the Foreign Office was fully aware of the arrests, trials and executions (roughly in that order) of a number of high-ranking generals, including Tukhachevsky.<sup>169</sup> When reflecting on why these 'strange and horrible proceedings' had occurred, the British were blunt.<sup>170</sup> From Moscow, the British *chargé d'affaires* sarcastically noted that the rumours of the past year about dealings between the Red Army and the Reichswehr (with the attendant political assumptions) had no doubt been used to fabricate 'the local speciality', a charge of 'high treason by inference'. This became the justification for what the British military attaché, Colonel R. C. W. G. Firebrace, termed 'juridical murder'. For Collier, this could be explained only by equating 'the mind of Stalin' to that of another ruthless ruler, Reza Shah. 'The only serious difference', Collier noted perspicaciously, 'is that in Persia one doesn't have to pretend to justify one's treatment of "traitors" and in Russia one still does – for the present'.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Firebrace (military attaché, Moscow), disp 12, 18 May, in Chilston to FO, disp 246, 19 May 1937, FO 371/21104/N2700/461/38, Vereker's minute (25 May).

<sup>168</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 269, 1 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N2921/451/38 and enclosures, minute, Collier (11 Jun).

<sup>169</sup> MacKillop to FO, tel 91, 9 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3010/461/38; MacKillop to FO, tel 94, 11 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3075/461/38; MacKillop to FO, tel 95, 12 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3076/461/38.

<sup>170</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 291, 15 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3177/461/38 enclosing Firebrace's disp (14 Jun), minutes, Collier and Oliphant (both 22 Jun).

<sup>171</sup> Aided by fabrications; Donald Cameron Watt, 'Who Plotted Against Whom? Stalin's Purge of the Soviet High Command Revisited', *JSMS*, 3, 1 (1990), 46–65; Steven J. Main, 'The Arrest and "Testimony" of Marshal of the Soviet Union M. N. Tukhachevsky (May–June 1937)', *JSMS*, 10, 1 (1997), 151–95.

Of greater importance for British strategic foreign policy, of course, was what evaluation was made of the impact of the Purges on the fighting capabilities of the Red Army. In February 1937, the COS had argued that the Red Army was becoming a formidable instrument, one that needed to be considered seriously in both Europe and the Far East.<sup>172</sup> Firebrace's initial evaluation of the impact of the Purges was both accurate and observant:

The main effect of this trial on the Red Army will be felt from the actual loss of experienced and competent officers, who will be difficult to replace . . . Initiative and originality of thought, essential qualities in a high commander, are likely to be conspicuously absent, being qualities too dangerous to be considered desirable in a Red Army Commander. . . I do not consider that there will be much effect on the rank and file.<sup>173</sup>

These views were accepted at the Foreign Office as definitive.

The Purges had an immediate impact on the situation in the Far East. On 30 June, the first secretary of the Japanese embassy in London called at the Foreign Office. There, he attempted to discover the British opinion of the effect of the Purges on the fighting capacity of Soviet Russia. The British had no intention of telling the Japanese anything that might encourage them to strike harder at China (or at British interests) as a result of believing Soviet Russia weak, and thus informed Hachiya that, '[a]s to whether Stalin's position and that of the regime had been strengthened or weakened, one could not at present say'. The Japanese, in the person of the counsellor at the embassy, made a second enquiry, this time attempting to draw Collier on the subject. True to his earlier remark on Hachiya's probings – 'he won't get much out of me!'<sup>174</sup> – Collier obfuscated. He emphasized that Stalin's actions had been taken to secure his own position and that this should 'strengthen' the ability of the Soviet state to resist 'foreign attack'. And, when the Japanese made another attempt at information gathering, this time in Tokyo, Collier advised J. L. Dodds, the British *chargé d'affaires*, to be similarly disingenuous. The true British view – the War Office's 'general conclusion' – of the impact of the Purges was too sombre and too dangerous to give to the Japanese:

<sup>172</sup> 'Review of Imperial Defence by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee', CID 1305-B, Chatfield, Ellington and Deverell, 22 Feb 1937, Cab 4/25; Neilson, "Pursued by a Bear", 214–15.

<sup>173</sup> Firebrace's disp (14 Jun) in MacKillop to FO, disp 291, 15 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3177/461/38.

<sup>174</sup> Minute, E. A. Walker (ND), 30 Jun 1937, FO 371/21104/N3412/461/38, Collier's minute (5 Jul).

in an effort to ensure the loyalty of the Red Army and its devotion to his person, Stalin has dealt a direct blow to its moral[e] and an indirect one to its efficiency, from which it will require considerable time, if not years, to recover. Indeed, if the 'purge' continues the Army may become completely demoralized.

This meant, the War Office suggested, that 'the value of the Soviet Union as an ally of France has decreased to a corresponding extent; and, conversely, her danger to Germany as an enemy has also declined'. The ramifications were evident. 'In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Germany, Japan and Italy are jubilant over this affair, while France is correspondingly depressed.' It was understandable, as Collier suggested to Dodds, to believe that there was a direct connection between the Purges and Tokyo's initiation of the Sino-Japanese War on 7 July.<sup>175</sup>

This latter event marked an end to one phase of British strategic defence policy making and the way in which Soviet Russia affected it. Since February 1936, increasing Soviet strength and the assertiveness of Soviet foreign policy had alternately heartened and annoyed the British. For the most part, Soviet strength was viewed favourably, since it seemed likely to deter Japan in the Far East and to check German aspirations in eastern Europe. What was not viewed favourably was the Soviet refusal to play only an auxiliary role. The Soviets continued to press, through the instrument of the Franco-Soviet Pact, for a more definite commitment from the Western Powers. This threatened to embroil the British in quarrels in eastern Europe where their direct interests were slight and their ability to play a military role was non-existent – at the same time as weakening their ability to defend their substantial interests in the Far East. It also gave the Germans a stick with which to beat the British. All negotiations for a general settlement – a new Locarno – or for naval arms control could be stalled by Berlin's constant contention that it was being 'encircled' by the Franco-Soviet Pact. This not only made Anglo-Soviet relations more difficult; it also complicated Anglo-French relations, as the British often saw the Front populaire government as too much affected by Soviet interests (as generated both officially in Moscow and domestically by the French Communists inspired by Moscow).<sup>176</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Collier's minute (6 Jul) on Dodds to FO, tel 204, FO 371/21104/N3447/461/38, and enclosures, one of which is Lt-Col Hayes (MI2, WO) to Vereker, 9 Jul 1937 and a memo, 'USSR. The "Purge" in the Red Army', nd, written by Hayes.

<sup>176</sup> John E. Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936–1937: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', *JCH*, 11 (1976), 217–36.

The Purges and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War meant that British strategic foreign policy and the role of Soviet Russia in it would have to be re-evaluated. Was Soviet Russia still strong enough to play, or interested in playing, a deterrent role in Europe? Could British interests in the Far East still shelter under the now-tattered red umbrella? What changes in the international situation were likely to derive from the new circumstances of July 1937?



## 6 Chamberlain's interlude: May 1937–September 1938

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When Neville Chamberlain became prime minister on 28 May 1937, he ushered in a new phase of the 'deterrence' period. As the British leader, he was in a position to implement the changes in strategic foreign policy that he had long advocated.<sup>1</sup> Not for him the uncertainty of the previous four years. He revelled in 'the wonderful power that the Premiership gives you'. 'As Ch[ancellor] of Ex[chequer]', he boasted to his sister in a typically hubristic letter, 'I could hardly have moved a pebble; now I have only to raise a finger & the whole face of Europe is changed.'<sup>2</sup> The relative lull in events – the German *Anschluss* with Austria on 13 March 1938 was the only major international occurrence until the Czechoslovakian crisis in September of that same year – should have provided him with the opportunity to do major facial surgery. However, circumstances were not entirely propitious for many of the prime minister's pet schemes.

In the Far East, the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities was compounded by the Japanese wounding of Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British ambassador to China, and the ensuing British pursuit of a Japanese apology. This meant that Chamberlain could not overtly seek a Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he had to content himself with an attempt to bring an end to hostilities while simultaneously ensuring that British interests in China were not overrun by the Japanese.<sup>4</sup> In Europe, the Spanish Civil War meant that relations with the 'dictator states' were tense and public opinion was inflamed. And the actions of Italian submarines in the Civil War, added to the Italian adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact on 6 November and Italy's leaving of the League a

<sup>1</sup> N. Chamberlain diary entry, 19 Feb 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 2/24A; N. Chamberlain to Halifax, 7 Aug 1937, Halifax Papers, FO 800/328.

<sup>2</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 8 Aug 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1015.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes, Cab 46(37), 8 Dec 1937, Cab 23/89A.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the Far East 1933–1939* (London, 2002), 230–61.

month later, meant that any warming of Anglo-Italian relations had to be attempted carefully, even clandestinely.

What was the place of Soviet Russia in all this? In the three years prior to the Sino-Japanese War, Moscow had returned to Great Power politics. Its insistence that its voice must be heard in international affairs had been reinforced by its burgeoning military power, and the British had been quick to recognize this fact. They were, however, reluctant to abandon their interpretation of what collective security meant in favour of the Soviet definition (which essentially meant a return to alliances difficult to distinguish from old diplomacy). The Purges weakened Moscow's bargaining position. The new-found British respect for Soviet military power was temporarily shelved, and the slower pace of events meant that Chamberlain was able to pursue British aims by the means that he preferred, without any direct co-operation with Soviet Russia. The tide of Soviet Russia's influence receded, and Anglo-Soviet relations again grew more distant.

But, before this can be examined, major changes in the British foreign-policy making élite need to be considered. When Chamberlain formed his Cabinet, he ensured that there would be little opposition to his policies.<sup>5</sup> Believing that he and Eden had a common view of foreign policy (and knowing that Eden, despite his popularity, was still very much a junior man), Chamberlain made no change at the Foreign Office.<sup>6</sup> Having found Sir John Simon a pliable, if incompetent, foreign secretary (and knowing that 'Soapy' Simon would be an obedient and loyal colleague), Chamberlain replaced himself as chancellor with Simon, a man who would continue the prime minister's policy of treating finance as the determining factor in rearmament.<sup>7</sup>

Opponents were either eliminated or moved. Duff Cooper, who had fought tenaciously at the War Office for an army capable of going to the continent was, much to his surprise, moved to the Admiralty.<sup>8</sup> Cooper at the Admiralty would not be as annoying to Chamberlain as he had been at the Horse Guards (or sniping from the back benches). Cooper's

<sup>5</sup> For a judgement, see Amery to Buchan, 29 May 1937, Buchan Papers, Box 9.

<sup>6</sup> David Dutton, *Anthony Eden. A Life and Reputation* (London and New York, 1997), 82–4; Harvey diary entry, 26 Mar 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Jenkins, *The Chancellors* (Basingstoke and Oxford, 1998), 385–8.

<sup>8</sup> Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget. The Autobiography of Duff Cooper* (London, 1954), 205–6; John Charmley, *Duff Cooper. The Authorized Biography* (London, 1986), 99–102; N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 30 May 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1006; J. P. Harris, 'Two War Ministers: A Reassessment of Duff Cooper and Hore-Belisha', *W&S*, 6, 1 (1988), 66–9. For Chamberlain's dislike, see minutes, Cab 20(37), 5 May 1937, Cab 23/88.

successor at the War Office was Leslie Hore-Belisha, whose junior status and party affiliation (National Liberal) ensured that he would be loyal to and dependent on Chamberlain.<sup>9</sup> Besides, Hore-Belisha was under the influence of Basil Liddell Hart, a leading military theorist who believed in a limited role for the British army on the continent, quite in line with Chamberlain's own predilections.<sup>10</sup> Cooper's predecessor at the Admiralty, Sir Samuel Hoare, could have retained that post. However, full of what Chamberlain termed 'restless ambition', Hoare was given the Home Office, where he could thrust himself into the 'hurly burly of every day politics'.<sup>11</sup> None the less, Hoare remained both influential and, as he was dependent on Chamberlain for office, subservient. With two tame National Liberals (Simon and Hore-Belisha) in the Cabinet, Chamberlain attempted to demote another, Walter Runciman, who was not. This angered Runciman, who refused to become Lord Privy Seal.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Runciman, who had been prominent in all economic aspects of strategic foreign policy and had worked closely with Chamberlain, left the government.<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain's Cabinet was complete and servile.

The direction and implementation of Britain's strategic foreign policy was also affected by changes in British representation abroad. In the first half of 1937, new ambassadors were appointed at Berlin, Paris and Tokyo.<sup>14</sup> Their place in events needs to be considered in detail. The new ambassador at Paris was Sir Eric Phipps.<sup>15</sup> For Phipps, Paris represented his heart's desire.<sup>16</sup> He also had excellent connections in Britain. He and Hankey were close friends, and Vansittart was his brother-in-law. The latter link was not always helpful. While ambassador to Berlin, Phipps had lobbied hard to succeed Sir William Tyrrell at Paris in 1934, but Vansittart had blocked the move, claiming that Phipps was

<sup>9</sup> J. P. Harris, 'The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933–1939', in David French and Brian Holden Reid, eds., *The British General Staff. Reform and Innovation, 1890–1939* (London and Portland, OR, 2002), 186–7; Harris, 'Two War Ministers', 69–71.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936–1940* (London, 1999), 64–6.

<sup>11</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 30 May 1937, Chamberlain Papers NC 18/1/1006.

<sup>12</sup> Runciman to Chamberlain, 7 May 1937, N. Chamberlain to Runciman, 6 May 1937, both Runciman Papers, WR 285.

<sup>13</sup> David Wrench, "Very Peculiar Circumstances": Walter Runciman and the National Government, 1931–1933', *TCBH*, 11, 1 (2000), 61–82.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Cameron Watt, 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors', in Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher, eds., *Diplomacy and World Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890–1950* (Cambridge, 1996), 136–70. I do not share Watt's interpretations.

<sup>15</sup> John Herman, *The Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps. Anglo-French Relations and the Foreign Office, 1937–1939* (Brighton, 1998), 7–31.

<sup>16</sup> 'Diplomatic Light and Shade', Phipps, 1942: Phipps Papers, PHPP 9/1.

too valuable where he was.<sup>17</sup> Phipps resented this, not realizing that his own lobbying was aiding an attack by Fisher on both Vansittart and the PUS's prerogative to help select ambassadors.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Phipps's desire for Paris was vital to his brother-in-law's struggle to remain as PUS. Vansittart had fended off Eden's efforts to remove him as PUS and make him ambassador at Paris by arguing that Phipps deserved the post. Thus, when Eden tried again in December 1936 and January 1937 to induce Vansittart to go to Paris, the latter was only too happy to transfer Phipps there.

The appointment of Phipps was important for the impact of Soviet Russia on British policy. Phipps had friends among the French Right, and shared their view of the malign influence of the Communists on French political life. While in Berlin, Phipps had seen how the Franco-Soviet Pact had played on British policy, and, when he arrived in Paris, he did so in the midst of the national unrest that has been termed the 'guerrilla war' between labour and capital lasting from June 1936 to November 1938.<sup>19</sup> Phipps also tended to support the fascists in Spain, although not too much should be made of this, for Phipps disliked fascism and communism equally. As he put it in a typically witty remark: 'With cholera on the Right and bubonic plague on the Left I prefer to steer a middle course.'<sup>20</sup> Even so, reports from Paris as to the role of Soviet Russia in French life would not be favourable.

Phipps's successor in Berlin was Sir Neville Henderson.<sup>21</sup> There has been much controversy over Henderson's time as ambassador, and he has been considered the arch-appeaser among British diplomatists.<sup>22</sup> There is no satisfactory explanation for his appointment to Berlin, only a contention that it was both a reward for his having done well at his previous posts and a recognition of his ability to handle difficult personalities. Whatever the case, Henderson claimed in his memoirs that he had been given a special mission by Neville Chamberlain, which has led to speculation that somehow the latter was responsible for

<sup>17</sup> Phipps to Simon, 4 Jan 1934, Vansittart's undated minute and Simon to Phipps, 8 Feb 1934, both FO 794/16.

<sup>18</sup> Fisher to Vansittart, 8 Jan 1934, Vansittart to Simon, 13 Jan 1934, both FO 794/8.

<sup>19</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France. Defending Democracy, 1934–1938* (Cambridge, 1988), 104–12.

<sup>20</sup> Phipps to Duff Cooper, 8 Dec 1938, Phipps Papers, PHPP 3/2.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Neville, *Appeasing Hitler. The Diplomacy of Sir Neville Henderson, 1937–1939* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000); Aaron Goldman, 'Two Views of Germany: Neville Henderson vs Vansittart and the Foreign Office, 1937–1939', *BJIS*, 6 (1980), 247–77.

<sup>22</sup> Watt, 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors'; Neville, *Appeasing Hitler*, xi–xv and 20–47; Neville, 'The Appointment of Sir Neville Henderson, 1937 – Design or Blunder', *JCH*, 33, 4 (1998), 609–19.

the ambassador's selection. It has been rightly pointed out that, as Henderson was appointed before Chamberlain became prime minister, and because ambassadorial posts were in the purview of the prime minister (usually as advised by the PUS), it was Baldwin and Vansittart who were responsible for choosing Henderson. However, given that Warren Fisher wanted Vansittart removed, and, as head of the Civil Service, attempted to wrest control of appointments from the PUS, it is not implausible that Chamberlain was able to influence selection even before he became prime minister, perhaps also through the agency of Sir Horace Wilson, the government's chief industrial adviser.<sup>23</sup>

Such a back-door approach was typical of Chamberlain. And Chamberlain's unhappiness with the Foreign Office was particularly acute in the spring of 1937 due to that office's opposition to the Treasury's desire to utilize discussions with Dr Hjalmar Schacht, the German minister of economics, as an unofficial conduit to Hitler.<sup>24</sup> And, certainly, there were those who pushed Chamberlain to take a more direct control of foreign policy. Hoare, clearly angling for his own place in the new Cabinet, sent a sycophantic letter to Chamberlain, pleading with the latter to avoid letting 'irrevocable or badly compromising' decisions occur in foreign policy before he became prime minister. Hoare also reinforced the chancellor's own prejudices, noting that he, too, was 'convinced that the FO is so much biassed against Germany (and Italy and Japan) that unconsciously and almost continuously they are making impossible any European conciliation'.<sup>25</sup>

However Henderson was appointed, and whether or not Chamberlain had given him a special mission, the new ambassador immediately began to make statements very different from those of Phipps. At the end of May 1937, Henderson made favourable remarks about National Socialism, and he suggested to the Austrian ambassador that *Anschluss* might not be a bad thing.<sup>26</sup> Henderson claimed that he was misquoted, but it was his advocacy of Britain's supporting German efforts to force France

<sup>23</sup> A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931–1938* (New York, 1986), 255–8.

<sup>24</sup> Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, 54–7; FP(36), minutes, 7th meeting, 18 Mar 1937, Cab 27/622; Eden to N. Chamberlain, 24 Mar 1937, Leith-Ross Papers, T 188/175; minute (5 Apr), Baxter (CD) on FP (36) 23, 'Anglo-German Relations. Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer', N. Chamberlain, 2 Apr 1937, FO 371/202735/C2618/270/18.

<sup>25</sup> Hoare to N. Chamberlain, 17 Mar 1937, Templewood Papers, IX, file 2; Headlam diary entry, 19 Dec 1935, in Stuart Ball, ed., *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee. The Headlam Diaries 1935–1951* (Cambridge, 1999), 80.

<sup>26</sup> Neville, *Appeasing Hitler*, 28–34; Eden to Henderson and reply, 3 and 8 Jun 1937, and Vansittart's minute for Eden, 18 Jun 1937, all FO 794/10; Dodd (United States ambassador to Berlin) to Phipps, 1 Jul 1937, FO 371/20711/3/18, minutes.

to give up its east European alliances that drew the most fire. This, of course, had been the substance of the entire debate about the impact of the Franco-Soviet Pact on the proposed new Locarno, and Strang and Sargent condemned Henderson's initiative. To advocate such a change would, as Sargent noted, 'stir up trouble and friction between France and Great Britain' and be a step in the direction 'of what always has been and still is Germany's constant aim, namely the isolation of France in Europe'.<sup>27</sup>

Such utterances from Henderson, who had twice been posted to Russia before the revolution and considered it an 'unpredictable country the mentality of which we in Britain and the West understand almost as little as we do that of the Japanese and the Chinese', and the transfer of Phipps quickly caught Maisky's attention.<sup>28</sup> The ambassador, no doubt extremely sensitive to changes in personnel (given how the Purges affected such matters in Moscow), enquired of Vansittart as to whether 'there was any truth in the wide-spread suspicion' that British policy was changing.<sup>29</sup> Vansittart denied it, but Henderson's appointment made it evident that Chamberlain's efforts to find a path to Berlin – with all that this adumbrated for Anglo-Soviet-French relations – would not find a roadblock in the British embassy there.

The final change was the appointment of Sir Robert Craigie as ambassador to Japan in March 1937.<sup>30</sup> Craigie's selection was, in many ways, an even bigger surprise than that of Henderson. The incumbent in Tokyo, Harry Clive, had made Knatchbull-Hugessen the 'favourite' in a 'book' that he was making as to his successor, and had not even considered Craigie.<sup>31</sup> The latter had never served in the Far East. Craigie's main role was acting as the Foreign Office's chief naval negotiator. He had developed a reputation as a consummate negotiator, always able to find a way around stumbling blocks. During this time, despite or perhaps because of his marriage to the daughter of an American diplomat, Craigie became an advocate of the need for firmness when dealing with

<sup>27</sup> Henderson to FO, disp 624, 5 Jul 1937, FO 371/20735/C4975/270/18, minutes, Mallet (12 Jul), Strang (14 Jul), Sargent (21 Jul) and Vansittart (22 Jul).

<sup>28</sup> Neville Henderson, *Water Under the Bridges* (London, 1945), 24.

<sup>29</sup> Vansittart's conversation with Maisky, 10 Jun 1937, FO 371/20735/C4229/270/18.

<sup>30</sup> Antony Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor. Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936–1941* (London, 1995), 30–33; Best, 'Sir Robert Craigie as Ambassador to Japan 1937–1941', in Ian Nish, ed., *Britain and Japan. Biographical Portraits* (London, 1994), 238–51; Peter Lowe, 'The Dilemmas of an Ambassador: Sir Robert Craigie in Tokyo, 1937–1941', *Proceedings of the British Association for Japanese Studies*, 2 (1977).

<sup>31</sup> Clive to Knatchbull-Hugessen, 14 Apr 1937, Knatchbull-Hugessen Papers, KNAT 2/55.

the United States.<sup>32</sup> He also became a confidant of Fisher and the Treasury. During the arms control talks, Craigie had sided with the Treasury against those whom he had disparagingly termed the 'pundits' of the Far Eastern Department, and had advocated a Japanese solution to naval arms limitation.<sup>33</sup>

While all the arguments concerning the (im)possibility of Chamberlain's influence affecting the choice of Henderson apply to Craigie's appointment as well, there is also room for speculation. This centres around the ongoing quarrel between the Treasury and the Foreign Office, particularly the Far Eastern Department, with regard to policy towards Japan. First, there was Craigie's co-operation with the Treasury. Second, there was Fisher's adamant opposition to Cadogan and particularly to his becoming PUS.<sup>34</sup> Given this, and Craigie's accommodating attitude towards the Treasury's views of Japan, it seems reasonable to suggest that Fisher and Chamberlain may have pushed for Craigie's appointment to Tokyo as a counter-weight to Cadogan's influence at the Foreign Office. This argument is also lent weight by the fact that Orde, head of the Far Eastern Department and another thorn in the Treasury's side, was put forward in June 1937 as the British minister to Riga.<sup>35</sup> In the event, Orde did not go to Riga until the spring of 1938, but the direction of appointments was clear.

Whether by design or coincidence, these appointments meant that a very different foreign-policy making élite was in place when Chamberlain took office. The Cabinet was reduced to a group that shared (or, at least, did not yet oppose) Chamberlain's strategic vision. The embassies at Paris, Berlin and Tokyo had new incumbents. The effect of these changes on the impact of Soviet Russia on British strategic foreign policy was evident. In the Cabinet, there would be a tendency to follow Chamberlain's line of reducing Britain's problems bilaterally, through agreements with Germany, Italy and Japan, without regard to Moscow. Among the representatives, Phipps disliked (at least the French) Communists, and believed that the 'French Govt [was] under the thumb of Moscow, so our policy is to be dictated by Litvinov!'<sup>36</sup> Henderson believed that Germany should move eastward and that France should

<sup>32</sup> B. J. C. McKercher, *The Second Baldwin Government and the United States, 1924-1929. Attitudes and Diplomacy* (London, 1984), 24-5, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Reported, Fisher to Chamberlain, 21 Jan 1935, T 172/1831.

<sup>34</sup> Peters, *Eden*, 256; Cadogan diary entry, 22 Jan 1934, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/2.

<sup>35</sup> Fisher to Chamberlain, 21 Jan 1935, T 172/1831; minute, Hoyer Millar (Eden's assistant private secretary) for Harvey (Eden's private secretary), 25 Jun 1937, FO 794/17.

<sup>36</sup> Phipps's views in Cadogan's diary entry, 16 Sept 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6.



end its commitments in that direction (at whatever cost to Anglo-Soviet relations). Craigie not only believed in making deals with Japan, but had also experienced several Soviet annoyances over naval arms control. It was unlikely, therefore, that he would let considerations of Moscow's usefulness in defending Britain's position in the Far East stand between him and a deal with Tokyo. Finally, at the Foreign Office, those favouring an alignment with Soviet Russia found their numbers and influence reduced. With Wellesley gone (he was forcibly retired in the autumn of 1936) and Orde going, Ralph Wigram dead and replaced by Strang (who hated Soviet Russia as a result of his time there during the Metro-Vickers crisis),<sup>37</sup> only Collier and Vansittart remained who favoured, if necessary, closer Anglo-Soviet relations. And Vansittart's influence was lessened by the fact that his own minister (along with Fisher) was attempting to remove him from office.

For the rest of 1937, as the conflict in the Far East deepened, Anglo-Soviet relations reduced themselves to speculations in the Foreign Office about the viability of the Franco-Soviet Pact, the significance of Italy's adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact and the impact on Anglo-Japanese relations of both the war in China and the Purges. Chilston believed that the Purges had eliminated even the reluctant French willingness to hold military staff talks with the Soviets.<sup>38</sup> He suggested that the Soviets, in retaliation, might now use the intransigent attitude of the Poles to renege on their treaty obligations to France.<sup>39</sup> But it was the Far East that drew the most attention. Partly, this was due to the COS, who noted that Britain could do little to protect its interests in the Far East should Tokyo attack. When this was discussed in mid-July at the Defence Plans (Policy) Committee, little was decided. Vansittart despaired that 'apparently no nettle is to be grasped'.<sup>40</sup> The defence of British interests in the Far East was now in the hands of others: notably, the Americans and the Soviets. The former, like the British, had neither 'the will [n]or the military power' to challenge Japan directly.<sup>41</sup> Washington preferred both

<sup>37</sup> Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 78–120.

<sup>38</sup> Chilston to Collier, 6 Aug 1937, FO 371/21095/N4147/45/38; Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making 1933–1939* (Oxford, 2000), 236–7; Robert Young, *In Command of France. French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933–1940* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 146–9.

<sup>39</sup> See also 'Poland and the Western Pact', I. Mallet (CD), FO 371/20709/C5185/1/18.

<sup>40</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is from 'Appreciation of the Situation in the Far East', COS 596, COS, 16 Jun 1937, Cab 53/32; DP(P), minutes, 3rd meeting, 13 Jul 1937, Cab 16/181; Vansittart's comments, FO 371/20952/F4773/9/10.

<sup>41</sup> Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations*, 229–33, quotation from 232; minutes, Cab 32(37), 28 Jul 1937, Cab 23/89; Victor Mallet (Washington) to Orde, 31 Aug



to pursue the creation of an Anglo-American economic agreement to check the Japanese and to keep in close touch with Britain about the Far East (but only informally, so as not to be seen as being used by London to 'pull our [British] chestnuts out of the fire').

The British had no such easy option. The Soviets were the alternative to the Americans, and co-operation with Moscow was full of pitfalls. At the end of July, the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* in Tokyo told his British counterpart that 'active co-operation' between Britain and Soviet Russia was the only way to curb Japanese aggression.<sup>42</sup> This revealed the tangle of considerations involved. To follow this advice would place the British firmly, in Japanese eyes, on the side of the Soviets. Nigel Ronald presumed that the Soviets were attempting to create the appearance of Anglo-Franco-Soviet solidarity to lend weight to any rebuke to Japan. For complex reasons, he was loath to see Britain associated with Soviet Russia. There were reports that the Soviets would provide supplies to China in the fashion of their support for the Spanish Republicans.<sup>43</sup> If that were to happen, the Germans and Italians hinted that they would 'go to Japan's assistance', raising concerns that the Anti-Comintern Pact went, as Orde put it, 'further than anything we have reason to think'. For these reasons, and as long as it was still possible that Japan would respond to something other than force, Ronald wanted 'to stave off as long as possible the evil day when we have to allow ourselves to be associated with the USSR'. Orde went further. He wished to avoid joining the Soviets in any 'representations to Japan even if Japan is not willing to listen to reason'. Fearing another Spain, with the Soviets ranged on one side with China and Italy and Germany supporting Japan on the other, he wished to maintain Britain's neutrality.<sup>44</sup>

Vansittart attempted to get to the bottom of this dangerous situation, dispatching querying telegrams to Soviet Russia and China. The replies were reassuring. Hugessen reported that the Soviets had offered nothing as yet to the Chinese, while the British *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow stated that 'the principal aim of Soviet policy in [the] Far East at [the] present

1937, FO 371/20955/F6303/9/10, minutes; Mallet to Orde, 7 Sept 1937, FO 371/29055/F6497/9/10.

<sup>42</sup> Dodds to FO, tel 257, 28 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4603/9/10, minutes, Ronald (29 Jul), Orde and Oliphant (29 Jul) and Vansittart (30 Jul).

<sup>43</sup> Knatchbull-Hugessen to FO, tel 260, 28 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4613/9/10; Dodds to FO, tel 258, 29 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4631/9/10.

<sup>44</sup> Drummond to FO, tel 150, 26 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4596/9/10, minutes, Ronald (29 Jul), Vansittart (29 Jul); Phipps to FO, tel 447, 28 July 1937, FO 371/20951/F4610/9/10, minutes, Orde (29 Jul) and Vansittart (29 Jul).

moment is to avoid war with Japan at almost any cost'.<sup>45</sup> Even a Japanese attack on the Soviet consulate at Tientsin did not seem sufficient to provoke Moscow into taking a stand. Vansittart was certain as to why this was so. In a remark that spoke to the effect of the Purges, he noted that the Soviets 'are in a very cautious mood – & for good reason'.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the case, Ronald contended that such Soviet passivity was a blessing, since it would prevent similar interventions in China by other countries, an opinion unchanged by the signing of a Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact on 21 August.<sup>47</sup> Nor were other possible combinations likely to coalesce. The British believed that the Italians, when they found 'that the Rome–Berlin axis involves duties as well as rights . . . will probably shirk them', and doubted that the Anti-Comintern Pact was likely to come into play.<sup>48</sup>

When Knatchbull-Hugessen was shot and wounded by a strafing Japanese aircraft on 26 August, Anglo-Japanese relations were largely suspended.<sup>49</sup> However, there were other venues where Soviet actions impinged on British strategic foreign policy. One was the Nyon Conference. This meeting, held from 10 to 14 September, was called ostensibly to deal with the piratical acts of Italian submarines in Spanish waters.<sup>50</sup> However, there was a hidden side to the talks that requires consideration before the significance of Soviet Russia to them can be understood.

The British knew beforehand that the Italians had decided to end the submarine campaign, and Chamberlain planned to use Nyon as a means to further an Anglo-Italian *rapprochement*.<sup>51</sup> The latter was intended to secure the British lines of communications to the Far East. The preliminary steps for improved relations with Rome had been taken by Chamberlain in July and August through backstairs negotiations initiated by the Italian

<sup>45</sup> Knatchbull-Hugessen to FO, tels 275 and 297, 30 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4724 and F4955/9/10; MacKillop to FO, tel 124, 30 Jul 1937, FO 371/20951/F4735/9/10.

<sup>46</sup> Cowan (Peking) to FO, tel 391, 3 Aug 1937, FO 371/20952/F4808/9/10, Vansittart's minute (5 Aug); Chilston to FO, tel 129, 7 Aug 1937, FO 371/20952/F4977/9/10, minute, Ronald (10 Aug); Chilston to FO, 14 Aug 1937, FO 371/21012/F5599/5137/10.

<sup>47</sup> Knatchbull-Hugessen to FO, tel 382, 23 Aug 1937, FO 371/21001/F5690/1098/10, minutes; Gage to FO, tel 400, 30 Aug 1937, FO 371/21001/F5832/1098/10; Chilston to FO, tel 133, 30 Aug 1937, FO 371/21001/F5924/1098/10, minute, Ronald (1 Sept).

<sup>48</sup> Minute, Thyne Henderson (FED) on Ingram (*chargé d'affaires*, Rome) to Orde, 2 Aug 1937, FO 371/20952/F4852/9/10; Ogilvie-Forbes (Berlin) to Strang, 11 Aug 1937, FO 371/20953/F5173/9/10.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes, Cab 24(37), 8 Sept 1937, Cab 23/89.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement. Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford, 1996), 216–18; Peter Gretton, 'The Nyon Conference: The Naval Aspect', *EHR*, 90 (1975), 103–12.

<sup>51</sup> William C. Mills, 'The Nyon Conference: Neville Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, and the Appeasement of Italy in 1937', *IHR*, 15, 1 (1993), 1–22.

ambassador at London, Dino Grandi.<sup>52</sup> While Chamberlain did not comprehend that he had been gulled by Grandi (who had fabricated a message from Mussolini to the prime minister in order to begin the talks), by 1 August the British leader was convinced that his negotiations had demonstrated the “‘Chamberlain touch’” in foreign policy. He believed that his talks would be successful ‘if only the FO will play up’, and, with unintended irony, later accused the Foreign Office of ‘seeing Musso[lini] only as a sort of Machiavelli putting on a false mask of friendship in order to further nefarious ambitions’.<sup>53</sup> The FO was suspicious of Mussolini’s motives, and were unwilling both to abandon the French and to give *de jure* recognition of the Italian annexation of Abyssinia in exchange for the uncertain promises of the Italian dictator. All this played into Nyon.

When the French refused to attend the Nyon Conference unless Soviet Russia also came, Eden extended an invitation to Moscow.<sup>54</sup> While the Italians opposed this and Chamberlain argued that any Soviet naval help was a ‘dubious proposal’, the Soviets did come to Switzerland. There, they insisted that Moscow be allocated a zone to patrol in the Aegean despite their limited ability to effect such an action.<sup>55</sup> Eden managed to find a face-saving compromise. Somewhat to Eden’s ‘surprise’, Moscow accepted it. He was doubly pleased that no ‘Anglo-French-Soviet bloc on an ideological basis’ had been ‘create[d]’.<sup>56</sup>

All seemed promising. The way was still open for discussions with Italy and Germany, despite the complications caused by the Franco-Soviet relationship and the check to Chamberlain’s Italian schemes.<sup>57</sup> Cadogan, however, was still unhappy about Soviet involvement. He worried about Soviet influence on the follow-up to Nyon (which was

<sup>52</sup> Following based on N. Chamberlain’s letters to his sisters: Hilda, 1 Aug 1937, Ida, 8 Aug 1937, and Hilda 29 Aug 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1014, 1015, 1018; Eden to Halifax, 11 Aug 1937, Avon Papers, AP 20/5/25A; Halifax to Eden, 12 Aug 1937, Avon Papers, AP 20/5/26; Peters, *Eden*, 278–92; H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Inter-war Period 1918–1940* (Westport, CT, 1997), 160–2; William C. Mills, ‘The Chamberlain–Grandi Conversations of July–August 1937 and the Appeasement of Italy’, *IHR*, 19, 3 (1997), 594–619; Mills, ‘Sir Joseph Ball, Adrian Dingli, and Neville Chamberlain’s “Secret Channel” to Italy, 1937–1940’, *IHR*, 24, 2 (2002), 278–317.

<sup>53</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 12 Sept 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1020.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes, Cab 34(37), 8 Sept 1937, Cab 23/89; see also Yücel Güçlü, ‘The Nyon Arrangement of 1937 and Turkey’, *MES*, 38, 1 (2002), 53–70.

<sup>55</sup> Following based on Eden to N. Chamberlain, 14 Sept 1937, Prem 1/360; minutes, Cab 35(37), 29 Sept 1937, Cab 23/89.

<sup>56</sup> Diary entry, 9 Sept 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6.

<sup>57</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 19 Sept 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1021.

co-ordinated from Geneva): 'Trouble is that Geneva is a purely Franco-Russian atmosphere, and the Russians can twist the French tail, so our policy is dictated from Moscow.'<sup>58</sup> But Soviet influence on France was not necessarily permanent. Phipps noted that the Front populaire government was on shaky political ground and could be succeeded by a national government in which men of the Right would be represented: 'On these men', the ambassador noted, 'Russian torpedoes or Russian blandishments may have less effect [than] upon certain members of the present Government.'<sup>59</sup>

In the autumn of 1937, British policy in the Far East marked time. While the opening of the 'odious' Japanese bombing campaign in China prodded several to importune Eden to take action, he did not 'believe we can do anything [in the Far East] because [the] US will not play'.<sup>60</sup> Eden would have welcomed co-operation with the Americans, but Chamberlain preferred, following Craigie, that Britain offer its best offices to end the conflict.<sup>61</sup> The Admiralty were also wary. They felt that, even if the Americans were willing to impose an embargo on both China and Japan, there was 'little reason to hope that . . . they would be prepared to afford us military support'.<sup>62</sup> Given this, the Admiralty counselled caution. This advice was easily accepted at the Foreign Office.<sup>63</sup> With the Japanese in a truculent mood, and the American position unclarified by Roosevelt's famous 'quarantine' speech at Chicago on 5 October (in which the American president spoke of the need to 'quarantine' those states that threatened international peace), the British would do as well to look to Moscow as to Washington for any immediate assistance in the Far East.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Diary entry, 22 Sept 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6.

<sup>59</sup> Phipps to Eden, 30 Sept 1937, Phipps Papers, PHPP 1/19.

<sup>60</sup> Halifax to Eden, 27 Sept 1937, Avon Papers, AP 20/5/28; Amery to Buchan, 29 Sept 1937, Buchan Papers, Box 8; Earl De La Warr to Eden, 28 Sept 1937, Avon Papers, AP 13/1/43E; Eden to De La Warr, 28 Sept 1937, Eden Papers, FO 954/6; Eden's minute (30 Sept) on John Maynard Keynes to Gladwyn Jebb, 29 Sept 1937, FO 371/21015/F7822/6799/10; minutes, Cab 36(37), 6 Oct 1937, Cab 23/89.

<sup>61</sup> Untitled memo, ns [but N. Chamberlain], 27 Sept 1937, Prem 1/314; Harvey diary entry, 2 Oct 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394.

<sup>62</sup> Adm to FO, 4 Oct 1937, FO 371/21014/F7372/6799/10, minutes.

<sup>63</sup> 'Minutes of Inter-Departmental Meeting held at the Foreign Office on October 13', 1937, ns, FO 371/21015/F8143/6799/10.

<sup>64</sup> Cranborne's interviews with the Japanese minister at Berne, 22 and 30 Sept 1937, both Cranborne Papers, FO 800/296; Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations*, 234–6; minutes, Cab 36(37), 6 Oct 1937, Cab 23/89; Mallet to FO, tel 324, 5 Oct 1937, minutes; FO to Mallet, tel 433, 12 Oct 1937, both FO 371/21019/F7477/7240/10 and reply, tel 340, 12 Oct 1937, FO 371/21019/F7792/7240/10; N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 9 Oct 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1023; and N. Chamberlain to Buchan, 19 Nov 1937, Buchan Papers, Box 9.

It was important, therefore, for Britain to know the state of Soviet–Japanese relations. By September, the British had come to suspect that Japan had been preparing for war in China before the Marco Polo incident in July. However, some also suspected that the preparations had been ‘for a war with Soviet Russia’.<sup>65</sup> Craigie believed that the warmth of Anglo–Japanese relations depended on two things: the strength of Britain in the Far East and the Japanese need for Britain’s ‘benevolent neutrality’ in any future war with Soviet Russia.<sup>66</sup> And there were strong rumours that Japan planned to expand the war to Soviet Russia (taking advantage of the disorganization caused by the Purges), although opinion at the Foreign Office was sceptical.<sup>67</sup> What, then, was the state and nature of Anglo–Soviet relations themselves? The British *chargé d’affaires* in Moscow analysed Litvinov’s speech at Geneva on 21 September. MacKillop argued that the two states had common interests, inasmuch as both ‘favour[ed] the creation of a genuine collective system of international security’. He sympathized with the Soviet idea that ‘the right policy to adopt is one of aggressiveness against the aggressors’, given that the ‘perfect collective system’ that both Britain and Soviet Russia desired did not exist. But he then backed away from his analysis, which pointed towards the possibility of a grouping of Britain, France and (Soviet) Russia, on the grounds that such a grouping had resulted in war in 1914. To Collier, this retreat from iron logic was unacceptable: ‘Is it maintained that the Anglo–Russian *rapprochement* before 1914 was a bad thing because it brought us into the war? The alternative would surely have been that we should have lain at the mercy of a Germany victorious over France & Russia.’<sup>68</sup>

On the eve of the Brussels Conference, held to discuss the situation in the Far East, Craigie sent disconcerting news about the possibility of Italy’s adherence to the Anti–Comintern Pact. This possibility engendered some sarcasm at the Foreign Office. If Tokyo wished to argue that it was still attempting to ‘cultivate’ good relations with Britain, Vansittart noted dryly, ‘the Japanese have strange notions of cultivation’.<sup>69</sup> As to the pact itself, the Foreign Office believed that it was not only anti–Soviet in a military sense, but also a diplomatic weapon designed to bring other

<sup>65</sup> Memo, DOT, 7 Sept 1937, FO 371/21035/F6556/142/23, Ashton–Gwatkin’s minute (17 Sept).

<sup>66</sup> Craigie to FO, disp 448, 9 Sept 1937, FO 371/21029/F7662/38/23.

<sup>67</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 489, 5 Oct 1937, FO 371/20992/F7449/243/10, minutes; Craigie to FO, tel 555, 19 Oct 1937, FO 371/21041/F8128/609/23, minutes.

<sup>68</sup> MacKillop to FO, disp 483, 7 Oct 1937, FO 371/21243/W18952/250/98, Collier’s minute (23 Oct).

<sup>69</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 605, 29 Oct 1937, FO 371/21040/F8754/414/23, Vansittart’s minute (1 Nov).

nations into the anti-communist orbit.<sup>70</sup> To prevent this, Craigie suggested that Britain make an initiative to improve Anglo-Japanese relations. Such an idea found little support at the Foreign Office. There, opinion was solid that the problems resulted from Japan's desire to dominate China. 'Whilst they are in this expansionist and aggressive mood it will be quite impossible for us to be on terms of friendship with them', wrote one clerk in the Far Eastern Department, '[t]hey are out to plunder us if they can and a brigand is not the friend of his potential victim'.<sup>71</sup> As Orde had noted in late October about the Japanese actions: 'I fear nothing but defeat, exhaustion or Russian intervention will alter this attitude.'<sup>72</sup>

Brussels again illustrated the impact of Soviet Russia on Britain's attempt to orchestrate affairs. By mid-October, the British realized a number of things: that the Americans were not planning to take any action at Brussels, that they were anxious to avoid any suggestion that they 'were being dragged along by the British' and that sanctions against Japan might lead to precipitate action by Tokyo against British interests.<sup>73</sup> The latter had to be avoided, the Admiralty emphasized, because it would be impossible to send a large fleet to the Far East and dangerous to send a smaller one.<sup>74</sup> With respect to the United States, the British needed to avoid 'giv[ing] the Yank the excuse of saying that, while *they* were prepared to do anything, *we* were hanging back'.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that, when the British and American delegates first met at Brussels, they agreed that the point of the conference was to 'make peace' if possible, to ensure close liaison and to avoid talking about sanctions. The conference was to be an exercise in the confidence-building measures that were a feature of Anglo-American relations generally.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Forbes (Lima) to FO, tel 46, 10 Nov 1937, FO 371/21828/F9369/25/23, minutes; Eden to Lindsay, tel 644, 24 Nov 1937, FO 371/21828/F9655/26/23.

<sup>71</sup> Craigie to Cadogan, 4 Nov 1937, FO 371/21030/F10445/28/23, minutes including minute, W. W. Thomas (8 Dec).

<sup>72</sup> Minute (27 Oct), Orde on Craigie to FO, tel 587, 26 Oct 1937, FO 371/21015/F8498/6799/10.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes, Cab 37(37), 13 Oct 1937, Cab 23/89; minute, Pratt (8 Oct) on Mallet to FO, tel 332, 7 Oct 1937, FO 371/21014/F7574/6799/10.

<sup>74</sup> 'Committee on British Shipping in the Far East. Reinforcement of British Naval Forces in the Far East. Note by the First Lord of the Admiralty', FES (37) 4, Chatfield, 23 Sept 1937, FO 371/20979/F8559/130/10; minutes, 218th meeting COS, 18 Oct 1937, Cab 53/8; Kelly (minister plenipotentiary, Cairo) to FO, tel 568, secret, 16 Oct 1937, FO 371/20911/J4324/244/16; commander-in-chief Mediterranean to Adm, tel 127, COS, 16 Oct 1937, FO 371/20911/J4322/244/16.

<sup>75</sup> Cadogan diary entries, 19 Oct and 2 Nov 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6, original emphasis.

<sup>76</sup> Clive (Brussels) to FO, tel 76, 2 Nov 1937, FO 371/21016/F9046/6799/10; Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations*, 236–8; minutes, Cab 38(37), 20 Oct

The joker in the pack was the Soviet stance. The Soviets had come to Brussels determined to see that 'the provisions of the Covenant should be applied to the fullest extent in favour of China'.<sup>77</sup> This cut across the bows of the Anglo-American position. Unsurprisingly, Litvinov found the conference frustrating. On 9 November he told Eden that he was returning to Moscow to report the unsatisfactory nature of the discussions. The Soviet commissar for foreign affairs then predicted the future of the conference: 'no very definite reply from Japan for some time. Germany and Italy would manoeuvre with hints and suggestions' as to Japan's willingness to negotiate, 'but nothing much would result'. Litvinov's 'sincere conviction' was that the *status quo* Powers must either 'combine their action or Germany, Italy and Japan would one day virtually dominate the world'. He offered Moscow's co-operation 'provided that the necessary guarantees were given by all participants'. When Eden pointed out that Anglo-Soviet relations were as good ('fairly satisfactory') as could be expected given 'the feelings about Communism held by many people in Great Britain', Litvinov replied 'that he could not understand how anybody in Great Britain today could have any reason to apprehend the intentions of the Soviet Union'.<sup>78</sup>

The Brussels Conference unfolded as Litvinov had predicted. But, during it, two events complicated matters further. First, on 6 November Italy announced its adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact. Second, the news that Lord Halifax would travel to Germany on 17 November (despite Eden's objections) leaked out while Eden was in Brussels.<sup>79</sup> The conjunction of these two events made it appear as if the British were running after the dictators. Collier offered his opinion of what British policy should be. He argued that Germany, Italy and Japan were all pursuing aggressive, expansionist policies incompatible with British interests and that the three would 'hang together until there are spoils to divide, because their aims are such that if they do not hang together, they may each hang separately'. Thus, Collier criticized Craigie, Henderson and Lord Perth, the British ambassador at Rome, for advocating concessions to Japan, Germany and Italy respectively. He also found fault both with Phipps for trying to restrain the French from opposing

1937, Cab 23/89; Eden to George V, nd (but c. 15 Nov 1937), and A. Hardinge (George V's equerry) to Eden, 15 Nov 1937, both Eden Papers, FO 954/6.

<sup>77</sup> Minute, Pratt (8 Oct) on Mallet to FO, tel 332, 7 Oct 1937, FO 371/21014/F7574/6799/10.

<sup>78</sup> Clive (for Eden) to FO, tel 63, 9 Nov 1937, FO 371/21017/F9384/6799/10, Collier's minute (12 Nov).

<sup>79</sup> Harvey diary entries, 7, 8, 9 and 15 Nov 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394; Eden to Henderson, tel, 6 Nov 1937, FO 371/20736/C7725/270/18; Henderson to FO, tel 674, 8 Nov 1937, FO 371/20737/C8293/270/18, and Sargent to Henderson, 15 Nov



Mussolini and with Miles Lampson (British high commissioner to Egypt and Sudan) for championing 'an understanding with Hitler, as a means of weakening Mussolini's position in the Mediterranean'. How, then, to deal with the circumstances? For Collier, Britain must 'envisage a fight' if necessary, but what he preferred was that 'we must envisage . . . a state of armed truce based upon a balance of power, such as existed from 1870 to 1914'. Admitting that 'this is not a cheerful prospect', he argued that the publics of Britain, France and the United States were 'well enough educated' to accept such a policy.<sup>80</sup> At least one member of the Foreign Office had jettisoned the notion of collective security as promulgated by the League. Eden, too, had come to believe that the League was 'a sham'.<sup>81</sup>

The Foreign Office used Collier's arguments to rebut some of the contentions that the COS had made on 12 November.<sup>82</sup> At that time, the COS had argued that, in a war with Germany and Italy, Britain would be supported only by France and Belgium, with Soviet Russia and eastern Europe remaining neutral. In such a war, the western grouping would have the advantage only at sea, which would vanish if Soviet Russia were to come into the conflict, causing Japan to enter the war on the side of the Axis. The COS called for diplomacy both to reduce the number of potential enemies and to attract allies.<sup>83</sup> At the Admiralty, the thinking favoured an agreement with Germany and was anti-Soviet in the extreme. An agreement with Germany would free enough money for Britain's imperial defence needs (not coincidentally provided by the Royal Navy). As to potential allies, Captain T. S. V. Phillips, the director of plans, was brutal and direct: '[f]or obvious reasons we can place no trust in Russia as an ally. We should be faced with the absurd situation . . . of relying on an ally whose victory might well cost us more dearly than our own defeat'.<sup>84</sup>

1937 attached; N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 14 Nov 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1028.

<sup>80</sup> Untitled memo, Collier, 10 Nov 1937, FO 371/20704/C8961/2524/62, his minute (7 Dec).

<sup>81</sup> Minutes, Cab 43(37), 24 Nov 1937, Cab 23/90A.

<sup>82</sup> 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January 1938', CID 1366-B, COS, 12 Nov 1937, Cab 4/26; 'Strength of Great Britain and of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', CID 1373-B, Eden, 26 Nov 1937, Cab 4/27; linkage to Collier's memo, his minute (7 Dec) in FO 371/20704/C8961/2524/62, minutes in FO 371/23593/C7851/205/62.

<sup>83</sup> Adm to FO, 4 Oct 1937, FO 371/21014/F7372/6799/10; Air Ministry to FO, 13 Oct 1937, FO 371/21015/F7835/6799/10; Hankey to Vansittart, 3 Nov 1937, and Hankey to Horace Wilson, both Wilson Papers, T 273/410.

<sup>84</sup> Untitled minute by Chatfield for Duff Cooper, 10 Nov 1937; 'Notes on Defence Expenditure Papers', very secret, T. Phillips (director of plans), 10 Nov 1937, both Adm 205/80.



The Foreign Office rejected this thinking. Collier argued that '[i]f a war breaks out in Europe in the next few years, its most likely cause is surely a German attack on Czechoslovakia or some other complication in Eastern Europe'. This would mean that the COS's assumption of neutral states – including Soviet Russia – in that region was wrong. Thus, Collier believed that 'our chief diplomatic task' was bringing the eastern European states on to the side of Britain and France, rather than letting them 'drift over to the other' side. As to the Far East, he submitted that the COS's argument that Soviet Russia's adherence to the British side would bring in Japan was a case of "putting the cart before the horse" . . . the truth being that Japan would intervene against us, if she saw a likelihood of our being beaten, whether or not we had Russia on our side'.<sup>85</sup> This argument became Eden's rebuttal of the COS's paper. Not surprisingly, when the issue was discussed in Cabinet on 8 December, the gist of Collier's arguments (which pointed towards the need for better relations with Soviet Russia) was ignored by Chamberlain, who simply emphasized the Foreign Office's attempt to avoid having Britain face three enemies simultaneously.<sup>86</sup>

This reflected Chamberlain's continuing discontent with the Foreign Office and his increasing tendency to see Eden as sharing its views. This was manifest. On 6 November, in a mixture of jealousy and exasperation, Chamberlain noted that 'Anthony's speech in the H[ouse] of C[ommons] was a great personal triumph for him but it contained some unfortunate passages from my point of view and shows again a characteristic of the FO mind which I have frequently noticed before. They never can keep the major objects of foreign policy in mind.'<sup>87</sup> A week later, he was unhappy over the Foreign Office's objections to Halifax's visit: 'In fact I have had to fight [the FO] every inch of the way . . . as I never know how Van interprets my messages or what comments he adds.' By the end of the Brussels Conference, Chamberlain was confident that the mild prescription agreed to there 'looks just like an answer to the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis', but added that he had been forced to curb 'our bellicose FO which was anxious to finish up the Brussels Conference with more fist shaking at Japan'.<sup>88</sup>

There were other fissures within the policy making élite. Hankey also spoke to the growing gap between the prime minister and the duo of Eden and Vansittart. 'Van professes to share my views about the

<sup>85</sup> Collier minute (17 Nov 1937) on CID 1366-B, FO 371/23593/C7851/205/62; see also, 'The USSR Air Forces', Air Staff Intelligence, December 1937, Air 9/58.

<sup>86</sup> Minutes, Cab 46(37), 8 Dec 1937, Cab 23/90A.

<sup>87</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 6 Nov 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1027.

<sup>88</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 21 Nov 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1029.

desirability of coming to terms with Italy, but I don't feel sure of him', the Cabinet secretary wrote to his son, and Eden 'hates Dictators so much that he seems to me unwilling to make a real effort'. Hankey ascribed Eden's position to jealousy of Chamberlain's policies: '[Eden] is personally vain and doesn't like anyone else to get any credit in Foreign Affairs . . . [H]e plays to the gallery of the extreme left, and is much too subservient to France and the minor nations.' Hankey contended that the position of Eden and Vansittart was an isolated one in the Foreign Office '(except Rex Leeper, I suspect, who is important)'.<sup>89</sup>

He was mistaken. In addition to Leeper, Sargent and, essentially, Cadogan (not to mention Collier and Orde) were in the same corner. Leeper prepared a publicity campaign designed to rebut those critics (including Chamberlain), who claimed that the Foreign Office 'have antagonised Germany, Italy and Japan; that we cannot defend the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Far East simultaneously and that we must therefore buy off one of the three enemies'. Leeper needed to show that 'the legend that England and France are purely static in their outlook and negative in their policy' was incorrect. And, in a remark that spoke directly to issues of ideology involving Soviet Russia, Leeper suggested that the Foreign Office should temper its criticism of fascism and recognize that it had, 'in spite of the price which has been paid for it by the destruction of freedom . . . let loose an energy and an enthusiasm which has accomplished a great deal of constructive work' in Italy and Germany. Criticism should focus, instead, on the British being 'opposed to ideological blocs', in the fashion of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Both Vansittart and Sargent agreed, but the PUS noted that an even-handed policy towards fascism would be difficult, as '[w]e shall be asked if we have nothing to say about Communism, for example. Don't let us get on to dangerous & controversial ground unnecessarily'.<sup>90</sup>

However, Vansittart's days as PUS were numbered. Not even his and Eden's close collaboration when dealing with the French ministers, who had come to London in the aftermath of the Halifax visit, could save the PUS.<sup>91</sup> On 7 December, Chamberlain's 'mines' were exploded, and the prime minister told Eden that Vansittart should be removed as PUS and made chief diplomatic adviser to the government.<sup>92</sup> Vansittart

<sup>89</sup> Hankey to Robin, his son, 21 Nov 1937, Hankey Papers, HNKY 3/42.

<sup>90</sup> Untitled memo by Leeper, 6 Dec 1937, FO 371/21626/C95/95/62, minutes and marginalia by Sargent, Vansittart and Cadogan (7 Dec).

<sup>91</sup> Harvey diary entry, 5 Dec 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394; N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 5 Dec 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1030A.

<sup>92</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 5 Dec 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1030A; Harvey diary entry, 7 Dec 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 53694.

immediately defended himself; however, to Chamberlain's smug satisfaction, Vansittart's dismissal occurred without complications, and he was 'relegated to a sort of newly discovered Siberia known as the post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser' on 1 January 1938.<sup>93</sup> This was only part of Chamberlain's wider policy to avoid the continental commitment that Vansittart's policy required. Just a fortnight earlier, on 23 November, Chamberlain and Hore-Belisha had agreed to replace the incumbent CIGS, Sir Cyril Deverell, who strongly favoured sending an expeditionary force to the continent, with someone more pliable.<sup>94</sup> Chamberlain had cleared a path for the unobstructed implementation of his own policies, a move that meant any co-operation between Britain and Soviet Russia would be less likely.

While this complicated manoeuvring was going on, there was careful consideration of the Soviet position in the Sino-Japanese War. On 22 November, R. G. Howe, the British counsellor at Nanking, contended that supporting China to resist Japan risked three things: 'that China may be driven into the arms of Russia'; that China might return to the 'the old provincial war lord system'; and that China might lapse into 'communism'. Vansittart felt that 'this brandishing of the Russian bogey' was unrealistic: 'Russia is in such a state of weakness and complete disorganization just now that I am not disposed to be greatly alarmed by it.' Orde went further. If China were 'driven into the arms of Russia,' it did not matter, since '[s]o far as Russia commits herself she will be involved with Japan, which in Asia is to our advantage and in Europe not so greatly to our disadvantage, since Russia's military potentiality in the Far East is very largely thought to be independent of her potentiality in the West'. Chinese war-lordism would simply bog the Japanese down, and communism 'is not . . . a real bogey; it will, if it comes about, be a Chinese brand and an internal affair with which it will not be impossible to come to terms'. Given this, Orde contended that supporting Chinese resistance against Japan should be continued 'to such a small extent as is possible for us'.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Vansittart to Eden, 9 Dec 1937, Avon Papers, AP 20/5/32; N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 12 Dec 1937, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1031; Eden to N. Chamberlain, 12 Dec 1937, Avon Papers, AP 20/5/14; Cadogan diary entries, 13, 15 Dec 1937, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/6; Harvey diary entry, 18 Dec 1937, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394; Valentine Lawford, *Bound for Diplomacy* (London, 1963), 271.

<sup>94</sup> Hore-Belisha diary entry, 23 Nov 1937, in R. J. Minney, ed., *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London, 1960), 68–9; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), 253–65. I would like to thank Professor David French for calling my attention to this point.

<sup>95</sup> Howe to Vansittart, tel 674, 22 Nov 1937, FO 371/20959/F9888/9/10, minutes, Vansittart (22 and 23 Nov), Orde (22 Nov).

While the British had decided to support the Chinese, they were unwilling to accept any criticism for the amplitude of this support. In the middle of December, the British were told that Soviet Russia could give China no more support because Britain was refusing to do its share.<sup>96</sup> This generated sarcasm at the Foreign Office: 'Now where are all the fine phrases about the embattled defenders of the Soviet Paradise?' There was a certain irony in the situation: 'Poor Russia is unable to help China because Gt. Britain has not promised to protect her.'<sup>97</sup> There was also a realization that a closer relationship between Moscow and London in the Far East would have ramifications elsewhere: 'I can think of little so calculated as [sic] to bring Germany and Italy into the struggle as overt Anglo Russian cooperation nor can I conceive that an Anglo-German rapprochement would survive any attempt on our part to act with Russia in the Far East.'<sup>98</sup> Finally, there was both annoyance about the Soviet attempt to shift the blame on to Britain and a suspicion of Soviet motives: 'Russia will always try to fish in troubled waters and will be a bad and faithless ally.'<sup>99</sup> Finally, Eden suspected that the Soviets were 'saddling us with their own desire to do nothing, or very little'.<sup>100</sup> There was also speculation about the possibility of a Russo-Japanese war. The War Office felt it 'illogical' that Japan should begin a conflict.<sup>101</sup> This was particularly so because the military balance in the Far East between the two countries was so even. But a conflict could not be ruled out. This analysis was largely accepted at the Foreign Office, although there were thoughts there that Soviet Russia was in a 'conciliatory' mood, which might encourage the Japanese to attack.<sup>102</sup>

By the end of 1937, with Britain unable to send forces to the Far East due to the European situation, with the United States seemingly unwilling to do more than protest against the Japanese sinking of the American

<sup>96</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 593, 10 Dec 1937, FO 371/20691/F11157/9/10; Gage (Hankow) to FO, tel 29, 16 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11229/9/10; Gage (Hankow) to FO, tel 33, 19 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11343/9/10; untitled minute, Pratt, 20 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11289/9/10, minutes on the above.

<sup>97</sup> Minute, Thyne Henderson (20 Dec) on Gage (Hankow) to FO, tel 29, 16 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11229/9/10.

<sup>98</sup> Minute, Ronald (13 Dec) on Gage (Hankow) to FO, tel 31, 11 Dec 1937, FO 371/20960/F10852/9/10.

<sup>99</sup> Minute, Thyne Henderson (23 Dec) on Pratt's untitled minute, 20 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11289/9/10.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes, Eden (23 Dec), Cadogan (24 Dec) on Gage (Hankow) to FO, tel 33, 19 Dec 1937, FO 371/20961/F11343/9/10.

<sup>101</sup> 'Russo-Japanese Relations', secret, Maj. C. R. Major, MI2(c), 21 Dec 1937, WO 106/5636.

<sup>102</sup> Minutes generally; esp. Cadogan's (29 Dec) on a copy of the paper in n.101, FO 371/20961/F11429/9/10.

gunboat, USS *Panay*,<sup>103</sup> and with Soviet Russia acting only indirectly against the Japanese by providing supplies to China, there remained only a policy of 'stalemate' in the Far East and Chamberlain's pursuit of an Italian (or German) settlement in Europe. This was not satisfactory to some. From Tokyo, Craigie continued to advocate an Anglo-Japanese *rapprochement*. He claimed that this was necessary to avoid any Japanese settlement with Soviet Russia that would turn Tokyo southward, endangering British interests.<sup>104</sup> In a letter combining personal pique ('if you would sometimes listen to my suggestions') with a plea for friendship towards Japan, Craigie pushed hard for London to change its views. Craigie's supplications were to no avail. As Cadogan informed him on 3 January 1938, the British government preferred to work with the United States to limit Japan's actions.<sup>105</sup> And any Japanese offers to protect British interests in China created only suspicion. The Foreign Office felt that these offers were both designed to persuade the British to close down Hong Kong as a source of supplies for China and due to a realization that 'the deterioration in relations [of Japan] with the Soviets, together with Japan's growing unpopularity with the United States, calls for an attempt to improve relations with Great Britain'.<sup>106</sup> Despite Craigie's views, British interests would be based on utilizing the delicate balance provided by Soviet military strength, continuing support for China and a veiled suggestion of Anglo-American co-operation.

What, then, of Soviet Russia? During the events of December 1937, Maisky had spent his time attempting to divine the implications of Halifax's visit to Berlin. He also stressed to the War Office that the Purges had not weakened the Soviet armed forces. Collier worried that Soviet foreign policy might become 'increasingly passive', but he was optimistic that it would not lapse either into 'an open declaration of "isolationism" or a departure from the League of Nations'.<sup>107</sup> None the

<sup>103</sup> Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, 46–8; L. Pratt, 'Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', *Journal of the RILA*, 47 (1971), 745–63; David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937–1941. A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (London, 1981), 60; minute, Orde (1 Jan) of meeting with Ingersoll, 1 January 1938, and 'Memorandum of Meeting with Captain Ingersoll (3 January 1938)', Chatfield, both FO 371/22106/F95/84/10; Lindsay to FO, tel 27, 7 Jan 1938, FO 371/22106/F313/84/10.

<sup>104</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 853, 20 Dec 1937, FO 371/21040/F11314/414/23.

<sup>105</sup> Craigie to Cadogan, 2 Dec 1937, and FO to Craigie, cipher tel 3, 3 Jan 1938, both FO 371/22180/F71/71/23.

<sup>106</sup> Minute, Brennan (1 Apr) on Craigie to FO, tel 389, 30 Mar 1938, FO 371/22180/F3468/71/23; see also Cranborne's interview with Amau (Japanese minister, Berne), 1 Feb 1938, Cranborne Papers, FO 800/296.

<sup>107</sup> Vansittart's talk with Maisky, 1 Dec 1937, FO 371/20737/C8352/270/18; Hayes (MI2) to Collier, 20 Dec 1937, and reply, 5 Jan 1938, both FO 371/21102/N6317/250/38.

less, Collier worried that 'any sign of Russian weakness or passivity is likely to encourage the Germans and the Japanese'.<sup>108</sup> Chilston supported this analysis.<sup>109</sup> The ambassador contended that the Soviet government hoped to see all of its enemies involved elsewhere. Soviet newspapers, in fact, argued that the 'capitalist Powers' had, since the time of the Brussels Conference, attempted 'to embroil the Soviet Union with Japan for their own entirely selfish and aggressive ends'.<sup>110</sup>

With respect to Europe, rumours abounded. The possibility of a Soviet-German *rapprochement*, accompanied by a parallel diminution in the Franco-Soviet Pact, was carefully dissected. However, British opinion in Moscow, London and Berlin was unanimous in believing that ideological differences between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany made this unlikely. This circumstance was not necessarily permanent. Nevile Henderson noted that, should Hitler make changes in Central Europe, this would weaken the Rome-Berlin Axis and a Russo-German *rapprochement* would be made more likely.<sup>111</sup> From Geneva, there were reports that only Hitler was opposed to improved German-Soviet relations.<sup>112</sup> But improved relations between Moscow and Berlin was not the only possibility. The French ambassador at Berlin even claimed that Neville Chamberlain desired closer Franco-Soviet relations.<sup>113</sup> In Moscow, there were public attacks on the French government for giving support to White Russian organizations within France.<sup>114</sup>

However, before this, in February, the composition of the British foreign-policy making élite was altered again. Eden's resignation on 20 February, over his myriad points of difference – the recognition of Abyssinia, Chamberlain's handling of Roosevelt's initiative of January and policy towards the dictators generally – with the prime minister, meant that another advocate of closer Anglo-French relations (and, indirectly or otherwise, more dealings with Soviet Russia) had departed.<sup>115</sup> This Soviet connection had been evident earlier, when Hankey had remarked that the foreign secretary had been 'much criticised

<sup>108</sup> Collier to Hayes (WO), 14 Jan 1938, FO 371/22288/N97/97/38.

<sup>109</sup> Chilston to Collier, 19 Jan 1938, FO 371/22288/N488/97/38.

<sup>110</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 40, 25 Jan 1938, FO 371/22106/F1139/84/10.

<sup>111</sup> Chilston to Collier, 24 Jan 1938, FO 371/22288/N499/97/38, minutes; Chilston to Strang, 24 Jan 1938, FO 371/22288/N524/97/38; Nevile Henderson to Strang, 26 Jan 1938, FO 371/22288/N565/97/38, minutes.

<sup>112</sup> UK delegation (Geneva) to FO, tel 3, 27 Jan 1938, FO 371/21660/C621/62/18.

<sup>113</sup> Nevile Henderson to N. Chamberlain, 7 Feb 1938, and Eden to N. Chamberlain, 14 Feb 1938, both Prem 1/258.

<sup>114</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 17, 21 Jan 1938, FO 371/21598/C435/55/17; Chilston to FO, disp 84, 7 Feb 1938, FO 371/21598/C998/55/17.

<sup>115</sup> Norman Rose, 'The Resignation of Anthony Eden', *Hj*, 25, 4 (1982), 911–31; Ritchie Ovendale, 'Appeasement' and the English Speaking World. *Britain, the United States, the*

in inner circles [by which Hankey doubtless meant by Chamberlain] owing to the coolness of his references to Germany and Italy . . . in contrast to his warmth for France and to some extent those foul Russians'.<sup>116</sup> Hankey's relief at seeing Eden's resignation was based on the former's hard-headed appreciation of the military circumstances and the advantages to be gained by eliminating Rome as an enemy.<sup>117</sup> However, there was also little doubt that Hankey, like Chamberlain, did not favour containing the revisionist Powers through possible co-operation with Soviet Russia. Nor was Hankey the only one who felt that Eden's leaving opened new possibilities for British strategic foreign policy. From Berlin, Neville Henderson noted after the resignation that 'it must be admitted that it was unlikely any understanding with Germany was possible so long as Eden was Secretary of State . . . Eden and Hitler could never have agreed.' While Henderson noted that 'everybody here is at heart profoundly relieved at Eden's departure',<sup>118</sup> in Paris everyone was 'gravely perturbed' by this event.<sup>119</sup> So, too, was Maisky, who believed that Eden 'really was working up to a London-Paris-Moscow triangle', something that Chamberlain could not tolerate.<sup>120</sup>

Eden's successor was Lord Halifax.<sup>121</sup> He had not sought the Foreign Office; in fact, when Chamberlain asked him whether he would like the office, Halifax told Oliver Harvey, who had been Eden's private secretary, that 'he was very lazy and disliked work. Could he hunt on Saturday's [sic]?'<sup>122</sup> This did not mean that Halifax had no interest in the position. During his time as Privy Seal, he had acted as Eden's understudy at the Foreign Office. And, as Lord President under Chamberlain, Halifax had continued in this role. When Halifax came to office, he was a supporter of the Chamberlain strategy of coming to terms with the dictators, and viewed Eden's abhorrence of doing so as being too fastidious for practical politics. Halifax contrasted this with his own approach to foreign policy: the 'world is a strangely mixed grill of good and evil,

*Dominions and the Policy of Appeasement, 1937-1939* (Cardiff, 1975), 66-116; and Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations*, 239-40.

<sup>116</sup> Hankey to Robin, his son, 31 Jan 1937, Hankey Papers, HNKY 3/42.

<sup>117</sup> See Hankey to Robin, his son, 1 Mar 1938, Hankey Papers, HNKY 3/43.

<sup>118</sup> Henderson to Halifax, 27 Feb 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/313.

<sup>119</sup> Phipps, telephone message, nd (but c. 20 Feb 1938), Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

<sup>120</sup> Nicolson diary entry, 7 Mar 1938, in N. Nicolson, ed., *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930-1939* (London, 1966), 329.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew Roberts, 'The Holy Fox'. *A Biography of Lord Halifax* (London, 1991), 4-87.

<sup>122</sup> Harvey diary entry, 23 Feb 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394; Headlam diary entry, 10 Mar 1938, in Ball, *Headlam Diaries*, 125.



and for good or ill we have got to do our best to live in it'.<sup>123</sup> However, this willingness to work with dictators did not mean that Halifax was Chamberlain's creature, nor that he was dependent on the prime minister. As Oliver Harvey noted a few months into Halifax's tenure as foreign secretary: 'if a real divergence occurred between the PM and H[alifax], the latter would resign as A[nthony] E[den] did. The PM cannot afford to lose another Foreign Secretary so that H. is in a stronger position than A.E.'<sup>124</sup> As one observer wryly noted, Halifax's 'acceptance [of the foreign secretaryship] has done much to convince people that Eden's resignation is not so great a tragedy as Eden thinks'.<sup>125</sup>

As to Halifax's views of Soviet Russia, it is impossible to believe that he, as a high churchman and a moral conservative, could have found much to like about the Bolsheviks. While he had been viceroy of India, the Soviet threat to India had been a major issue.<sup>126</sup> However, that had not turned Halifax into an anti-Soviet. In 1927, during the discussions of whether to break with Moscow, Halifax had indicated that, like dictators, Soviet Russia could not be either ignored or ostracized. As he wrote to Robert Cecil:

Do not let the Cabinet break with the Soviet if you can help it. I cannot see that it would do the slightest good . . . It may be that you will never alter Russia by appeals to a correct theory of international relation[s], but that the process will be much slower and will only come about through Russia herself no longer wanting to be a bother to everybody, and that this in turn will only come about when she has been, by trade or otherwise, drawn out of her isolation. If you stand sufficiently far away from a single horse he can give a very effective kick; but if you are among a dozen horses in a railway-truck, they cannot hurt you.<sup>127</sup>

Only time would tell whether the Soviet 'horse' could be harnessed to British purposes, but Halifax was not unwilling to try to bridle the beast.

While these changes of personnel were going on, there was much speculation about the strength of the Red Army. From Tokyo, Craigie was certain that the Japanese no longer regarded Soviet Russia as their principal enemy – that spot now being occupied by Great Britain – because of the perceived weakness of the Soviet armed forces. He anticipated a deterioration in Russo-Japanese relations. Some at the

<sup>123</sup> Halifax to Roger Lumley (governor, Bombay), 31 Mar 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/328. For a similar estimation of Eden's shortcomings, see Headlam diary entries, 22 Dec 1935, 7 Mar 1937, 20 and 22 Feb 1938, in Ball, *Headlam Diaries*, 81, 108, 123–4.

<sup>124</sup> Harvey diary entry, 1 Jun 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394.

<sup>125</sup> Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Buchan, 27 Feb 1938, Buchan Papers, Box 9.

<sup>126</sup> Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922–1939', *CJH*, 28, 2 (1993), 197–206; 'Soviet Activities in Central and Eastern Asia', CID B-732, Milne (CIGS), 15 Mar 1927, Cab 4/16.

<sup>127</sup> Lord Irwin [Halifax] to Cecil, 6 Apr 1927, Cecil Papers, Add MSS 51084.



Foreign Office accepted this contention.<sup>128</sup> But this was a minority view. Others doubted that Japan's behaviour stemmed either from a belief in Soviet weakness or from the ramifications of Soviet policy. Instead, it was felt that the shape of the international situation generally would determine events:

Our information goes to show that the USSR are not disposed to pick a quarrel with Japan, though they are keeping their powder dry on the Manchuria frontier, and I believe that they will not show fight so long as the situation in Europe is in a state of flux. They would not wish to be embroiled in Europe & the Far East simultaneously. On the other hand there is always the danger that disturbances in Eastern Europe would encourage the Japanese Army to try their strength against Russia.<sup>129</sup>

This latter fear was particularly acute in March, when the *Anschluss* was followed hard by a border dispute between Lithuania and Poland.<sup>130</sup>

What of Soviet military capabilities? It was not just the Red Army Purges that were thought to affect Soviet prowess. The ongoing trials of the so-called right-Trotskyite bloc were also dissected for their military significance. There was little doubt at the Foreign Office that the trials augured ill for Soviet Russia.<sup>131</sup> In a widely circulated and highly lauded dispatch, Chilston contended that the 'outlook for this country must be black'.<sup>132</sup> While it was believed in London that in the short term the Purges had strengthened Stalin's grip on Soviet Russia, it was equally felt that they would have a disastrous effect on the country's long-term strength. They would also have implications for foreign policy. This reinforced the earlier thoughts that Soviet foreign policy might enter into an isolationist phase. It also diminished any belief in the military value of Soviet Russia. 'It will be a terrible day', Oliphant noted on 13 April, 'if ever we have to rely on Russia.'<sup>133</sup>

What did all this mean for British strategic defence policy and Soviet Russia? The impact of the *Anschluss* was not felt just in Europe. It was also evident in matters of imperial defence, as the CID's discussions of

<sup>128</sup> Craigie to FO, disp 72, 12 Feb 1938, FO 371/22185/F2844/152/23, minutes.

<sup>129</sup> Minute, Davis, 2 Mar 1938, FO 371/22298/N1042/725/38; Dalton diary entry, 12 Apr 1938, in Ben Pimlott, ed., *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918–1940, 1945–1960*, (London, 1986) 232.

<sup>130</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 74, 19 Mar 1938, FO 371/22288/N1411/97/38; Lampson (ambassador, Cairo) to FO, tel 163, 18 Mar 1938, FO 371/22299/N1479/924/38.

<sup>131</sup> Minute, Falla (29 Mar) on Chilston to FO, disp 140, 21 Mar 1938, FO 371/22286/N1506/26/38.

<sup>132</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 141, 21 Mar 1938, FO 371/22286/N1507/26/38, minutes.

<sup>133</sup> Oliphant's minute on Chilston to FO, disp 153, 31 Mar 1938, FO 371/22286/N1758/26/38.

possible staff conversations with France and Belgium indicated.<sup>134</sup> Here, it was decided to exclude Italy from the list of possible British antagonists. Chatfield also insisted that the French (who opposed any dealings with Italy) must be made aware of the fact that, without an Anglo-Italian agreement, Britain must take greater account of the Japanese. Thus, France would not only have to defend the Mediterranean, but also to help patrol 'the Home area'.<sup>135</sup> Some felt this would be an admission of weakness and would affect Anglo-French relations detrimentally.<sup>136</sup> But most believed that, if the Franco-Soviet alliance were to have teeth, and to strengthen the British bite, then British concerns about the Far East and defence matters generally would have to be considered, and France would have to adjust its policy accordingly.

But Europe remained at the centre. How would Britain respond to the *Anschluss*? Would Germany now threaten the rest of eastern Europe (particularly Czechoslovakia)? And what role would Soviet Russia play? On 17 March, Litvinov publicly offered Soviet participation in any act of collective security. Cadogan was profoundly suspicious of Soviet motives. 'The Russian object', the PUS wrote, 'is to precipitate confusion and war in Europe: they will not participate usefully themselves: they will hope for the world revolution as a result (and a very likely one, too).' Vansittart, now able to comment only from the sidelines, pointed out that the Soviet offer of aerial assistance might be of some worth.<sup>137</sup> But there was scepticism about both Soviet intentions and capabilities. Even the Soviet ambassador at Rome seemed to think that the likelihood of Soviet assistance to Prague was small, while the Czech military attaché in the Eternal City noted that his country had accepted a Soviet alliance only 'because France had insisted on it'.<sup>138</sup>

Once again, everything centred round the issue of whether France, despite its commitments and alliances in eastern Europe, should be supported. Once again, Soviet Russia was a complication. This emerged at the Foreign Policy Committee meeting on 18 March. Halifax observed that 'the more closely we [associate] ourselves with France and Russia the more we [produce] on German minds the impression that we were plotting to encircle Germany'. There were two options: either to 'mobilise all our friends and resources and go full out against Germany',

<sup>134</sup> Minutes, CID, 319th meeting, 11 Apr 1938, Cab 2/7.

<sup>135</sup> Halifax to Duff Cooper, 11 Apr 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/309.

<sup>136</sup> Duff Cooper to Halifax, 11 Apr 1938, Hankey to Halifax, 12 Apr 1938, both Halifax Papers, FO 800/309.

<sup>137</sup> Maisky to Halifax, 17 Mar 1938, FO 371/21626/C1935/95/62, minutes, Cadogan (17 Mar), Vansittart (18 Mar).

<sup>138</sup> Charles (Rome) to Ingram, 18 Mar 1938, FO 371/21712/C1965/1941/18.

or to 'remind France of what we had often told her in the past, namely that we were not prepared to add in any way to our existing commitments' and to tell Paris that it 'must not count on military assistance' if a war with Germany broke out over Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain added that helping the latter country was a 'hopeless' task and that it would lead to a 'war on Germany',<sup>139</sup> something for which Britain was not yet prepared. Both men had little confidence in Soviet Russia: Halifax was reported as being 'very suspicious' of Moscow.<sup>140</sup> Chamberlain was even more distrustful. He told his sister that he saw 'the Russians stealthily and cunningly pulling at the strings behind the scenes to get us involved in war with Germany (our Secret Service doesn't spend all its time looking out of windows)', and he denigrated Churchill's calls from the back benches for a 'Grand Alliance' against Germany as impractical.<sup>141</sup>

However, at a later meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee, the entire policy was revisited.<sup>142</sup> Here, the COS outlined all the problems that going to war over Czechoslovakia would entail. But there was opposition to telling France that Britain would not support it. Oliver Stanley, the president of the Board of Trade, argued that to do so would have a 'catastrophic' effect on France, and it was decided to enquire in Paris about French attitudes. From the French capital, Phipps was unequivocal. It was 'wiser to assume that the French genuinely intend to fulfil their engagements'.<sup>143</sup> What of the Soviets and the Czechs themselves? The reports were mixed. From Berlin, the British military attaché felt that the Czechs would fight if France and Soviet Russia did too, but he was 'personally doubtful' that the French would come in and believed that the Soviets would be 'unlikely to do so effectively'.<sup>144</sup> Vansittart opposed this evaluation. He cited approvingly the pro-Soviet remarks of Edouard Herriot, a major opposition political figure in France:

Is he not right in saying that it is 'absurd to ignore her [Soviet Russia]'? Is he not right in thinking she is a 'useful counterweight to Germany'? Surely everybody recognises that political fact – unless the two countries, with their not far different systems, ultimately coalesce. And it is quite conceivable that this may

<sup>139</sup> FP(36), minutes, 26th meeting, 18 Mar 1938, Cab 27/623.

<sup>140</sup> Harvey diary entry, 19 Mar 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394.

<sup>141</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 20 Mar 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1042.

<sup>142</sup> FP(36), minutes, 27th meeting, 21 Mar 1938, Cab 27/623.

<sup>143</sup> Phipps to Cadogan, 24 Mar 1938, FO 371/21713/C2250/1941/18.

<sup>144</sup> Newton (Berlin) to FO, 29 Mar 1938, FO 371/21714/C2340/1941/18; minutes, Newton to Ingram (CD), 28 Mar 1938, FO 371/21714/C2361/1941/18.

happen if we make Russia 'feel isolated'; and even if she only 'withdraws more and more into Asia', we and the small countries stand to be the eventual losers, as Germany wakes.<sup>145</sup>

But Phipps was contemptuous of Herriot: 'He weeps . . . over red Spain: he revels in Soviet blood baths and feels convinced they will enormously increase the efficiency of the beloved Soviet Army.'<sup>146</sup> With such varied views, Halifax was not completely won over by Vansittart's argument. The foreign secretary contended that '[w]e should not, I fancy[,] be assisting the chances of peace between us & Germany if we were to "draw nearer" to Russia in such fashion as to draw further away from Germany.'<sup>147</sup>

Throughout April, the Foreign Office speculated about what Soviet policy would be in eastern Europe, particularly with respect to Czechoslovakia. Vansittart counselled that Britain should not 'cold-shoulder the Russians, nor drive them into isolation'.<sup>148</sup> Collier contended that, with Soviet 'preoccupations . . . becoming more and more exclusively internal', the Soviets would be unlikely to observe their treaty with Czechoslovakia by giving 'military assistance . . . even if the German attack on the latter were to take the form of open and unprovoked military invasion'. Instead, the Soviets would most likely 'continue to support French efforts to maintain the Little Entente and to keep the Roumanian and Yugoslav governments from falling under German influence'.<sup>149</sup> This view was supported by the views of the British military attaché in Moscow. Since the Red Army was viewed as being a formidable force only on the defensive, both Colonel R. C. W. G. Firebrace and opinion at the Foreign Office were 'doubtful', in Oliphant's words, that 'it w[oul]d be used for the *beaux yeux* of the Czechs'.<sup>150</sup>

Halifax was convinced by these views, noting on them: 'Let me have this paper for [the] French discussions', scheduled for 28–29 April.<sup>151</sup> In fact, the Foreign Office drew up a memorandum on Soviet strength specifically for the talks. The paper concluded that 'for a year at least,

<sup>145</sup> Minute Vansittart (7 Apr) on Phipps to FO, tel 205, 26 Mar 1938, FO 371/21612/C2134/1050/17.

<sup>146</sup> Phipps to Halifax, 19 Apr 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

<sup>147</sup> Minute, Halifax (8 Apr) on document in n.145.

<sup>148</sup> Dalton diary entry, 12 Apr 1938, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 232.

<sup>149</sup> 'What Are the Possible Effects on Soviet Policy of German Penetration into South Eastern Europe', Collier, 7 Apr 1938, FO 371/22299/N1735/924/38.

<sup>150</sup> Chilston to FO, 11 Apr 1938, FO 371/22288/N1999/97/38; Chilston to FO, disp 196, 19 Apr 1938, enclosing Firebrace's disp DO 7, 18 Apr, FO 371/22298/N1993/725/38, minutes, esp. Halifax's; Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear'", 215–16.

<sup>151</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on 'Visit of French Ministers to London', ns, 28–29 Apr 1938, FO 371/21591/C3687/13/17.

Soviet Russia is incapable and unwilling to fulfil Treaty obligations for Mutual Assistance in case of war and that the Soviet Government would run great risk of their being overthrown by so doing'.<sup>152</sup> Thus, it was unsurprising that Halifax told the French that Soviet weakness 'made it extremely doubtful whether Russia could be counted upon to make any great contribution, if indeed she could make any contribution at all, to the protection of Czechoslovakia'. Edouard Daladier, the new French prime minister, dissented, but this opinion was not accepted in London. While no one knew what were the Soviet intentions towards the country's treaty obligations to Prague, the overall British attitude was that '[t]he point is not whether the Soviet Govt. *will* honour obligations but whether they can'.<sup>153</sup>

The Anglo-French talks were viewed with 'suspicion' in Moscow. There were fears about the possibility of a four-power (Britain, France, Germany and Italy) alliance and a demand for 'strict adherence to the principles of collective security'.<sup>154</sup> Britain was accused of trying to persuade France to abandon its eastern European commitments. But the Soviets were unwilling to 'commit themselves publicly' to any military support for Prague.<sup>155</sup> There is little doubt that there was substance to the Soviet concerns. The British were concerned about the tangled connections between France, Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia. Halifax referred to the Czech treaty with Moscow as the 'greatest difficulty' in the situation, and hoped that, if the 'temperature' could be reduced, then the Czechs might become willing to abandon the 'Soviet connexion'.<sup>156</sup>

Efforts to weaken the Franco-Soviet link were made in several venues. In Moscow, the British *chargé d'affaires* did his best to persuade Robert Coulondre, the French ambassador to Soviet Russia, of Soviet weakness. Vereker told Coulondre that to accept Litvinov's and Voroshilov's assessment of Soviet resolution and strength was 'facile optimism'. Vereker emphasized the need to be 'strongly realist in dealing with Russian matters'. As far as he was concerned, 'even a partial military adventure or demonstration on their [the Soviets'] part was improbable'.<sup>157</sup> In

<sup>152</sup> 'Memorandum. Possible Opposition to Germany in case of an attack upon Czechoslovakia', ND, 26 Apr 1938, FO 371/16278/N2072/63, minutes.

<sup>153</sup> Minute, Mallet (CD) on Newton to FO, tel 105, 28 Apr 1938, FO 371/21716/C3620/1941/18.

<sup>154</sup> Vereker to FO, disp 230, 3 May 1938, FO 371/21591/C4032/13/17; Vereker to FO, tel 22, 9 May 1938, FO 371/21591/C4284/13/17.

<sup>155</sup> Minute (17 May), F. K. Roberts (CD) on Vereker to FO, tel 23, 10 May 1938, FO 371/21719/C4363/1941/18.

<sup>156</sup> Halifax to Henderson, 12 May 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/313.

<sup>157</sup> Vereker to FO, disp 248, 16 May 1938, FO 371/21720/C4656/1941/18, minutes.

London, Halifax spoke with Paul Reynaud, the French minister of justice, about the Franco-Soviet Pact. The foreign secretary made it clear to Reynaud (who tended, as Phipps put it, to 'sing pro-Soviet and anti-dictator . . . songs')<sup>158</sup> just why there was a British wariness of the pact: 'partly because people had a vague mistrust of Russia and partly because they were always afraid that through the Franco-Soviet Pact they might be in danger of being dragged into war'. However, Halifax was balanced in his account: 'on the other hand, a considerable body of opinion . . . feel not less strongly that, whether we liked Russia or not, she was yet capable of proving a valuable makeweight to German ambitions'.<sup>159</sup>

By the end of May, the Czechoslovak crisis had temporarily abated. Soviet Russia had decided that inaction was the best policy. In Geneva, there were rumours that Litvinov had told Georges Bonnet, the new French finance minister, that there could be little likelihood of Franco-Soviet support for Czechoslovakia without first having military staff talks between Paris and Moscow.<sup>160</sup> While Nevile Henderson tended to blame the entire crisis on Soviet meddling in Prague, his was a minority (and disputed) opinion.<sup>161</sup> More typical was the belief that the 'Soviets . . . have behaved with exemplary discretion and have made no move to encourage the Czechs or to make matters more difficult'.<sup>162</sup> This attitude was attributed primarily to Soviet military weakness: Soviet Russia 'will do everything possible to avoid engaging in war this year and . . . will find any pretext to avoid the necessity of having to fulfil her engagements to Czechoslovakia and France'.<sup>163</sup> With Soviet Russia discounted in Europe, Chamberlain preferred to counter the German moves into south-eastern Europe by means of the Anglo-Italian agreement, a political loan to the Turks and a rewriting of Czechoslovakia's treaties with France and Soviet Russia so as to eliminate German fears of encirclement, with a blithe blind-eye turned towards the effect that this might have on Moscow.<sup>164</sup> But, before we can deal with these issues, it is vital to understand the situation at that moment in the Far East.

<sup>158</sup> Quoted in Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, 98.

<sup>159</sup> Halifax's note of a conversation, 20 May 1938, FO 371/21591/C4587/13/17.

<sup>160</sup> Moscow Chancery to FO, 24 May 1938, FO 371/21723/C5421/1941/18.

<sup>161</sup> Henderson to FO, tel 239, parts I and II, 27 May 1938, FO 371/21722/C5063/1941/18, minutes, Vansittart (29 May) and Sargent (nd).

<sup>162</sup> Harvey diary entry, 26 May 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394.

<sup>163</sup> Vereker to FO, disp 267, 31 May 1938, FO 371/21723/C5420/1941/18.

<sup>164</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 28 May 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1054; Harvey diary entry, 8 Jun 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56394; minutes by Cadogan, 9 Jun, and Vansittart 10 Jun 1938, both FO 371/21725/C6039/1941/18; 'Possibility of Modifying Czechoslovakia's Treaties of Mutual Assistance with France and Russia', FP

In late April, Craigie again attempted to initiate an improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations. The ambassador argued two points: that Britain could achieve this more easily during rather than after the Sino-Japanese War and that British interests in North China would be diminished the longer the war continued. Sir John Brenan demolished this argument. The latter pointed out that Craigie's contentions were based on the assumption of a complete Japanese victory over China, an assumption not shared at the Foreign Office. And, as always, all was enmeshed in wider policy. To come to terms with Japan would involve abandoning China, forgoing Britain's established position at the League and alienating the other Powers – the United States and Soviet Russia – that had interests in the region. '[T]he Chinese determination to resist is strong', Brenan wrote, 'the army has been reorganised with German assistance, the Russians are helping with equipment; and the recent Chinese successes in Shantung have shown that there is a large reserve of moral and material strength still left in the country.' This all pointed towards a 'stalemate', something which had many advantages. Turning Craigie's presupposition of a decisive Japanese victory against him, Halifax pointed out that 'the earlier the war ends the more likely Japan is to be able to finance and prosecute her schemes outside China proper, the extrusion of the Russians from the Maritime Province and the southward expansion'.<sup>165</sup>

The same arguments were used by Halifax at the Foreign Policy Committee on 1 June when he advocated helping China to obtain a loan designed to prop up its war effort.<sup>166</sup> However, despite Halifax's advocacy, the loan died in Cabinet.<sup>167</sup> Using Craigie's arguments, the fears of the COS about a three-front war and with support from Chamberlain, Simon and the Treasury managed to block the loan unless it were made as a joint endeavour with the United States. Thus, by mid-July, with Washington unwilling, the Dominions desiring no trouble with Japan and the European situation menacing, the loan scheme collapsed.<sup>168</sup> However, despite this one victory, throughout the summer of 1938 Craigie's advocacy of improving relations with Japan was consistently rejected.<sup>169</sup>

(36) 63, Halifax, 14 Jun 1938, FO 371/21724/C5870/1941/18; FP (36), minutes, 31st meeting, 16 Jun 1938, Cab 27/624.

<sup>165</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 524, 26 Apr 1938, Halifax to Craigie, 17 May 1938, both FO 371/22180/F4462/71/23, minute, Brenan (2 May).

<sup>166</sup> FP(36), minutes, 30th meeting, 1 Jun 1938, Cab 27/623.

<sup>167</sup> Minutes, Cab 31(38), 6 Jul 1938, Cab 23/94.

<sup>168</sup> Minutes, Cab 32(38), 13 Jul 1938, Cab 23/94.

<sup>169</sup> Bradford A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War 1937–1939* (Stanford, 1973), 141–5; Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, 52–60; Craigie, disp 509, 14 July 1938, FO



During that same summer, the British also attempted to free their hands in Europe. They did so by trying to convince the Czechs and French to restructure both their alliance and their relationship with Soviet Russia. This was a continuation of the effort to prevent Britain from being tied to the coat-tails of France's eastern European policy. On 1 July, Phipps began the process by suggesting to Bonnet that the Czechs should become a guaranteed neutral in the fashion of the Belgians.<sup>170</sup> Phipps emphasized the fact that Germany is 'bent on [the] disruption of a Czechoslovakia which is *allied to Russia*' and that this latter was a 'perpetual menace to Germany'.<sup>171</sup> Bonnet delayed his reply, and, in the interim, there were leaks about this proposal to newspapers resulting in a hostile reaction from the Czechs.<sup>172</sup> There was also opposition in Paris, where senior officials at the Quai d'Orsay 'were not very keen' on demands for a neutral Czechoslovakia. The reasons were varied. First, the end of the Little Entente would have 'dangerous consequences'; second, a neutral Czechoslovakia would spell the end to using Czech territory as a launching pad for French aerial attacks on Germany and, finally, '[w]e could not hope that Germany would involve herself in an adventure with Russia' should Czechoslovakia become a neutral.<sup>173</sup>

In mid-July, Phipps again pushed Bonnet to pressure the Czechs. Bonnet, however, told the British ambassador that the Czech president, Edvard Beneš, was in a 'very unyielding mood'. But Beneš also had asked Bonnet to 'sound Russia as to the help that Power would be willing to give to Czechoslovakia in the event of war with Germany'.<sup>174</sup> Phipps warned Bonnet that it should not be assumed that Britain would 'take joint military action' with France if Czechoslovakia were attacked. Beneš's query made the British suspicious of Soviet Russia's commitment to Prague, despite earlier reports that this promise was unequivocal.<sup>175</sup> While Bonnet stalled, Neville Henderson suggested that the entire Czech imbroglio could be solved by means of a four-power conference involving Britain, France, Italy and Germany.<sup>176</sup> Vansittart pointed out

371/22051/F8491/12/10, minutes; Craigie to FO, tel 1000, 22 Aug 1938, FO 371/22051/F9092/12/10, minutes.

<sup>170</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 446, 2 Jul 1938, FO 371/21726/C6624/1941/18.

<sup>171</sup> Henderson to FO, tel 290 decipher, 1 Jul 1938, FO 371/21726/C6606/1941/18, original emphasis.

<sup>172</sup> Newton (Prague) to FO, tel 297, 11 Jul 1938, FO 371/21727/C6980/1941/18.

<sup>173</sup> Campbell (Paris) to Strang, 13 Jul 1938, FO 371/21728/C7274/1941/18, minutes.

<sup>174</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 473, 16 Jul 1938, FO 371/21728/C7155/1941/18, minutes, F. K. Roberts (CD, 20 Jul) and Strang (20 Jul).

<sup>175</sup> Chilton to FO, disp 296, 28 Jun 1938, FO 371/21776/C6534/5302/18, minute (13 Jul), Roberts.

<sup>176</sup> Henderson to FO, tel 319, 21 Jul 1938, FO 371/21729/C7375/1941/18, minutes, Vansittart and Halifax (both 25 Jul); Strang to Henderson (30 Jul).



that such a conference would be the 'thin edge of the German wedge for excluding Russia from Europe'. Further, if Italy were invited, why not Soviet Russia? Halifax agreed, and Henderson was informed of the thrust of Vansittart's arguments, although the ambassador ignored them.<sup>177</sup>

At the same time, the British had decided to deal directly with the Czech issue by sending Runciman to Czechoslovakia.<sup>178</sup> Maisky suggested suspiciously that this mission was being sent for the purpose of 'bludgeoning M. Benes and co[mpany]' and asserted that the British were 'not being sufficiently firm with Germany'.<sup>179</sup> This linked up with French views. On 10 August, Bonnet finally replied to the British queries about Czechoslovakia.<sup>180</sup> He insisted that this was politically impossible. Unless Britain were to make some 'positive' offer – by which he meant a promise of support – to France, Bonnet could not 'justify to the French public' giving up even Prague's limited assistance against Germany. Maisky simultaneously pushed hard in London, telling Halifax that German strength was more apparent than real, and asserting that Soviet Russia would 'in his phrase "certainly do their bit"' if Czechoslovakia were attacked.<sup>181</sup> From Moscow and Prague came similar statements of Soviet intent.<sup>182</sup>

The question remained: did the British believe in either the sentiment or the ability of the Soviets doing 'their bit'? From Romania, there were reports that Soviet overflights (in aid of Czechoslovakia) might be conveniently ignored, but that the passage of Soviet troops across Romanian territory would be resisted.<sup>183</sup> In Paris, Bonnet reported being 'pestered' by the Soviet ambassador to show more firmness towards Germany and

<sup>177</sup> Henderson to Strang, 2 Aug 1938, FO 371/21730/C7876/1941/18, minutes.

<sup>178</sup> Vaughan Burdin Baker, 'Selective Inattention: The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938', *East European Quarterly*, 24, 4 (1991), 425–45; Tony McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia in 1938: A New Perspective on Anglo-American Relations in the Era of Appeasement', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 1, 2 (2003), 152–74.

<sup>179</sup> Oliphant's talk with Maisky, 9 Aug 1938, FO 371/21731/C8218/1941/18.

<sup>180</sup> Campbell (Paris) to FO, tel 505, 10 Aug 1938, FO 371/21731/C8128/1941/38, minutes, Mallet (13 Aug), Sargent and Oliphant (both 15 Aug); Campbell to Sargent, 13 Aug 1938, FO 371/21731/C8329/1941/18.

<sup>181</sup> Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 17 Aug 1938, FO 371/21731/C8433/1941/18; Sidney Aster, 'Ivan Maisky and Parliamentary Anti-Appeasement, 1938–1939', in A. J. P. Taylor, ed., *Lloyd George. Twelve Essays* (London, 1971), 317–57.

<sup>182</sup> Chilton to Collier, 23 Aug 1938, FO 371/21733/C8919/1941/18; Newton to FO, tel 468, 26 Aug 1938, FO 371/21733/C8793/1941/18.

<sup>183</sup> Farquhar (*chargé d'affaires*, Bucharest) to Nichols, 25 Aug 1938, FO 371/21776/C9100/5302/18, minute, Roberts (5 Sept); Henderson to FO, tel 414, 5 Sept 1938, and Charles (Rome) to FO, tel 206, 10 Sept 1938, both FO 371/21766/C9216 and C9438/5302/18.

to encourage Britain to do the same.<sup>184</sup> Phipps, however, also reported that Bonnet had received no firm answer as to what aid Soviet Russia would give to Czechoslovakia and that the French foreign minister had suggested that the Soviets' 'one wish is to stir up general war in the troubled waters of which she will fish'.<sup>185</sup> From Moscow, Chilston reported that the Czech minister claimed that he had been assured by Litvinov that Soviet Russia would fulfil its treaty obligations in case of a German attack. However, the British ambassador did 'not attach very much importance to the somewhat half-hearted assurances which my Czech and French colleagues from time to time extract from M. Litvinov'. The Foreign Office agreed. Frank Roberts noted that the Czechs 'have consistently tried to read the maximum degree of comfort into M. Litvinov's vague assurances, all of which are in any case made dependent upon prior action by the French'. Another clerk pointed out that China had 'derived considerable comfort' from similar Soviet professions earlier, but in the event had 'to content themselves . . . with minor supplies of war material, military advisers, & incidents on the Manchukuo frontier – all of which have taken a long time in coming'.<sup>186</sup>

In London, Maisky lobbied hard to convince everyone of Soviet Russia's sincerity.<sup>187</sup> In early September, he told Churchill that Soviet Russia wanted to co-operate with Britain and France through the League, although Halifax was unimpressed.<sup>188</sup> Ten days earlier, the Soviet ambassador had told Harold Nicolson that Soviet Russia would intervene if Britain and France did. If they did not, however, Maisky noted that Moscow "'would retire into isolation'". He reiterated these points to Vansittart in late August, and chastised the former PUS for Britain's policy towards Soviet Russia, which the ambassador characterized as 'wish[ing] to keep them at arms length [sic] and hav[ing] as little to do with them as possible'.<sup>189</sup> This, of course, was true, but one-sided. Neither the British nor the Soviet government based its decision to co-operate with the other on the common good, but rather on the basis of a fear of the common enemy.

<sup>184</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 561, 2 Sept 1938, FO 371/21734/C9155/1941/18, minute, Roberts (5 Sept).

<sup>185</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 559 saving, 2 Sept 1938, FO 371/21734/C9157/1941/18.

<sup>186</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 165 conf, 4 Sept 1938, FO 371/21734/C9186/1941/18, minutes, Roberts (5 Sept) and Gage (12 Sept).

<sup>187</sup> John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London, 1989), 96–7.

<sup>188</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V, 1922–1939 (London, 1976), 968; Churchill to Halifax, 31 Aug 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/314; Churchill to Halifax, 3 Sept 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/322.

<sup>189</sup> Nicolson's talk with Maisky, 26 Aug 1938, Vansittart's talk with the Soviet ambassador, 29 Aug 1938, both FO 371/22289/N4317/97/38; Nicolson diary entries, 22 and 26 Aug 1938, in Nicolson, *Harold Nicolson*, 350–1.

The Czech crisis became acute in early September. What would Soviet Russia do? On 6 September, Phipps reported that Litvinov had told Bonnet that Moscow would 'wait until France has begun to fulfil the obligations incumbent on her according to her own pact with Czechoslovakia' and then take the issue to the League. Phipps, with the full support and concurrence of Cadogan, added that 'Bonnet feels that Russia is showing much more caution in this matter than she wishes others to show.' Roberts reiterated an earlier position: 'Russia will reserve her position until everyone else is involved & then come in or fish in troubled waters.'<sup>190</sup>

The belief that Soviet support was at best contingent was reinforced by other reports, none definitive. In Moscow, Chilston spoke with Vladimir Potemkin, the former Soviet ambassador to France and now Litvinov's deputy, who pointed out that Soviet Russia 'was not obliged' to act unless France did, and doubted that Litvinov would raise the issue at Geneva.<sup>191</sup> Reports from Poland made it evident that Warsaw would remain neutral unless Soviet troops attempted a passage through Polish territory: in that case, Poland would resist.<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, on 8 September, Maisky told Halifax that Soviet Russia would co-operate with Britain and France in sending a note to Berlin opposing any aggression against Czechoslovakia. Chilston reported from Moscow that the French ambassador had been assured that Soviet aid would be forthcoming, although, significantly, the French ambassador lacked 'full confidence' in this assertion.<sup>193</sup> On 17 September, the Foreign Office drew up a memorandum that attempted to clarify matters. The low opinion of Soviet military abilities that had been evident in the spring crisis over Czechoslovakia was still held. While Soviet Russia was 'active in suggesting joint representations', British information pointed 'to subordination of Russian assistance to previous implementing of the French obligations'; to 'reference of the question to Geneva; and to evasion of definite assurances where these have been sought'. Given that Poland would not permit Soviet troops passage and that the transportation routes through Romania were limited, the final conclusion was that '[e]ffective help is unlikely to reach Czechoslovakia from Russia, at all

<sup>190</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 573 saving, 6 Sept 1938, FO 371/21735/C9289/1941/18, minutes, Roberts (7 Sept), Cadogan (8 Sept).

<sup>191</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 166, 8 Sept 1938, FO 371/21736/C9429/1941/18.

<sup>192</sup> Kennard to FO, tel 73, 10 Sept 1938, FO 371/21776/C9648/5302/18.

<sup>193</sup> Halifax to Chilston, tel 120, 11 Sept 1938, FO 371/21735/C9415/1941/18; Harvey diary entry, 9 Sept 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; Chilston to FO, tel 169, 13 Sept 1938, FO 371/21776/C9791/5302/18; Phipps to Halifax, 14 Sept 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

events in the early period of a German invasion'. Cadogan's minute summed up matters: 'Pray God we shall never have to depend on the Soviet, or Poland or – the US'<sup>194</sup>

How did all this play in the Cabinet? On 30 August, Chamberlain had called an informal council of ministers due to the 'grave' international situation.<sup>195</sup> Halifax outlined the state of affairs: the evidence was unclear as to whether Hitler would attack Czechoslovakia. If he did, 'there was nothing that we in this country or France, or Russia could do' to prevent Czechoslovakia from being overrun. If Hitler did not intervene, then Britain's policy should be to 'keep Herr Hitler guessing' – a position that Vansittart, who was described at this time as 'still excited', found frighteningly reminiscent of 1914.<sup>196</sup> There were stirrings of opposition. Duff Cooper argued that the issue was not one of whether to support the Czechs, but of what to do in a European war, while the Earl of Winterton, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Oliver Stanley, president of the Board of Trade, both argued that no pressure should be put on France not to support the Czechs. All would depend on Hitler's speech at the Nuremberg rally on 12 September.

When the latter did not clarify things, Chamberlain was able to launch 'Plan Z', his visit to Hitler.<sup>197</sup> This plan was, indeed, as 'unconventional and daring' as the prime minister had termed it.<sup>198</sup> More significantly, it was completely in line with his thinking about foreign policy generally. Chamberlain did not want to put the decision for 'peace or war' into other hands.<sup>199</sup> 'Plan Z' kept matters securely under his control, and avoided the possibility that Britain could be dragged into war via France's east European connections. It also did not leave the decision of peace or war to Hitler alone. Chamberlain went to Berchtesgaden on 15 September.

Two days later, he reported to the Cabinet. Before Chamberlain spoke, Runciman made it evident that Czechoslovakia was unlikely to continue in its present state no matter what the British decided and that the French were unlikely to help. Chamberlain then outlined Hitler's demands: the Sudeten Germans must join the Reich and the

<sup>194</sup> 'Soviet Russia and Germany', Hadow, 17 Sept 1938, FO 371/22276/N4602/533/63, minute, Cadogan (21 Sept).

<sup>195</sup> Minutes, unnumbered meeting, Cab 23/94.

<sup>196</sup> Vansittart's memo, 7 Sept 1938, FO 371/21735/C9384/1941/18; Dalton diary entry, 5 Sept 1938, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 236; W. B. Brown (B of T) to Runciman, 6 Sept 1938, Runciman Papers, WR 293.

<sup>197</sup> Minutes, Cab 38(38), 14 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95.

<sup>198</sup> Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 94–5; N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 3 Sept 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1066.

<sup>199</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 11 Sept 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1068.

Czech–Soviet alliance must go. Neither was objectionable to most in the Cabinet. What the debate turned on was two views of foreign policy. The Lord Chancellor, Maugham, claimed that Britain should not interfere except for its interests and then only if it could with ‘overwhelming force’. Duff Cooper opposed this, and argued Eyre Crowe’s point that Britain’s policy had always been based on not permitting ‘any single power dominating Europe’. Both arguments depended upon the attitude of potential allies. That Soviet Russia was not likely to be considered one of these was underlined by two facts: first, that it was not discussed in this context, and, second, as noted, that a European war might destroy Hitler, but also could result in ‘changes in the state of Europe which might be satisfactory to no one except Moscow and the Bolsheviks’. All agreed that what was required was to determine the attitude of the French.<sup>200</sup>

However, this did not mean that Soviet Russia was of no account. For one thing, Maisky’s lobbying had produced, particularly among the Labour MPs, a popular belief that Moscow both could and would support Prague. Chamberlain moved to debunk this conviction. After the Cabinet on 17 September, he told a Labour delegation of French weakness, which they found a ‘profound shock’, and followed up this unpleasant news by stating that Soviet Russia would take action only after France did so and ‘then . . . [only] take the matter up at Geneva’, which they found ‘an even greater shock’.<sup>201</sup> For its part, the Soviet government was quick to denounce Chamberlain’s trip to Berchtesgaden. The British were accused of making ‘a deal at the expense of Czechoslovakia’ and of ‘abandon[ing] the principle of collective security and of collective action against aggression’. What the Foreign Office found significant about this charge was that it was not accompanied by any statement of Soviet policy, leading to the remark that the Soviet complaint was simply ‘the pot calling the kettle black’.<sup>202</sup> This suspicion of Soviet attitudes and a belief in Moscow’s tendency towards isolation were underlined on 19 September, when the Soviet government warned the French that any revision of the Czech–Soviet treaty would necessitate Moscow’s also having to reconsider its treaty relations with France.

<sup>200</sup> Minutes, Cab 39(38), 17 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95; Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 109–13.

<sup>201</sup> Minutes, Cab 40(38), 19 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95; Harvey diary entry, 20 Sept 1938, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; Dalton diary entry, 17 Sept 1938, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 240.

<sup>202</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 174, 17 Sept 1938, FO 371/21776/C10076/5302/18, minute, Speaight (19 Sept).

'Russia will also', it was noted at the Foreign Office, 'reconsider, no doubt, her whole position towards the Western Powers.'<sup>203</sup>

Discussions with the French on 18 September made it evident that neither London nor Paris was willing to make the first move to resolve the Czech crisis. However, for the same military reasons that they had always professed, the French rejected the idea of Czech neutrality; instead they put forward the idea of a joint guarantee of Czechoslovakia as a replacement for the Czech–Soviet treaty. The Cabinet accepted this idea. Discussion centred on two matters: the need to consult the Czechs and who would serve as the guarantors. As to the latter, opinion favoured a triumvirate of Britain, France and Soviet Russia. Simon made the point that it would be 'a mistake to take action which tended to put Russia out of Europe', significantly adding that to include it would help 'with sections of public opinion'.<sup>204</sup> Vansittart had made Simon's point earlier to Halifax, and the latter in turn asserted at Cabinet that forcing the Czechs to get rid of their Russian alliance would be 'grossly unfair'.<sup>205</sup> On 22 September, with no solution in sight, Chamberlain again flew to Germany to put forward these proposals to Hitler.<sup>206</sup>

While the prime minister was in Germany, efforts were made to clarify the Soviet position. On 23 September, Halifax reported that Litvinov had promised 'effective aid' to the Czechs the previous week.<sup>207</sup> R. A. Butler, the parliamentary undersecretary at the Foreign Office, was asked to make a further sounding.<sup>208</sup> But Litvinov's reply did not make matters clearer:

He said he could say no more than if French came to the assistance of the Czechs, Russians would take action. We asked him whether he intended to raise the matter at the League and if so whether he would wait to take action while the League was discussing the question. He said that they might desire to raise the matter in the League; this would not alter the proposition that he had stated namely that Czechoslovak–Soviet pact would come into force . . . He could not . . . tell us to what extent Russian army was mobilised or Air Force ready to assist Czechoslovakia.

<sup>203</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 260, 19 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C10105/5302/18, minute, Mallet (20 Sept).

<sup>204</sup> Minutes, Cab 40(38), 19 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95; minutes, Cab 41(38), 21 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95.

<sup>205</sup> Vansittart to Halifax, 16 Sept 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/314; untitled memo, Vansittart, 20 Sept 1938, FO 371/21739/C10324/1941/18.

<sup>206</sup> Minutes, Cab 42(38), 24 September 1938, Cab 23/95; Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 119–23.

<sup>207</sup> Minutes, Cab(38) 11, 23 Sept 1938, Cab 27/646; Nicolson diary entry, 23 Sept 1938, in Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 365–6.

<sup>208</sup> FO to Butler, tel 54, 23 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C10667/5302/18.

At the Foreign Office, this added little to what was known. What seemed clear, as Roberts noted, was that 'in these circumstances little confidence can be placed in effective Russian support'.<sup>209</sup>

Other efforts were made at clarification. From Moscow, Chilston reiterated that the Czech minister had been assured that the pact between Moscow and Prague 'remained fully in force'.<sup>210</sup> Phipps was pressed to discover whether the French had any intimations of possible Soviet action.<sup>211</sup> The ambassador's reply was substantially the same as Butler's report from Geneva, but Phipps added that 'Bonnet is not much impressed by this prospective late and limited Russian help'.<sup>212</sup> On 24 September, Phipps followed up this report by noting that General Maurice Gamelin, the French commander-in-Chief, had stated that Soviet aid could come only in the air, and, in a remark that drew fire from Vansittart and Sargent (who hoped for a strong French attitude in order to stiffen their own government), Phipps contended that '[a]ll that is best in France is against war, almost [doubly underlined] at any price'.<sup>213</sup> The always-observant Thomas Jones caught the situation nicely on 23 September: 'no one seemed to be able to state with any certainty what Russia was prepared to do, or what the result of the slaughter of the [Soviet] generals would be'.<sup>214</sup> Much depended on Chamberlain's visit to Bad Godesberg.

There, Hitler rejected the entire idea of a guarantee, and Chamberlain returned to Britain. On 24 September, Chamberlain told the Cabinet that he had found Hitler's attitude a 'considerable shock' and argued that the German chancellor's demand for an immediate transfer of territory must be accepted.<sup>215</sup> The Cabinet decided to consult the French. This transpired the following day, but overnight key changes occurred. Pushed by Cadogan, that evening Halifax underwent a conversion.<sup>216</sup> On Sunday morning, 25 September, Halifax declared that his

<sup>209</sup> Butler to FO, tel 42 immediate, 23 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C10585/5302/18, minutes, Roberts (24 Sept), Mallet (25 Sept).

<sup>210</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 183, 23 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C10500/5302/18.

<sup>211</sup> FO to Phipps, tel 321/23 Sept 1938, FO 371/21740/C10665/1941/18.

<sup>212</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 286, 23 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C10586/5302/18.

<sup>213</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 290, 24 Sept 1938, FO 371/21740/C10589/1941/18; Phipps to FO, unnumbered tel, 24 Sept 1938, FO 371/21740/C10602/1941/18, minutes; Herman, *Phipps Embassy*, 110–22.

<sup>214</sup> T. Jones to Abraham Flexner, 23 Sept 1938, in T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931–1950* (London, 1954), 409.

<sup>215</sup> Minutes, Cab 42(38), 24 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95.

<sup>216</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 24 Sept 1938, in David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938–1945* (New York, 1971), 103–5; Peter Neville, 'Sir Alexander Cadogan and Lord Halifax's "Damascus Road" Conversion over the Godesberg Terms 1938', *D&S*, 11, 3 (2000), 81–90.



views and those of the prime minister were no longer 'at one'.<sup>217</sup> This defection – what Chamberlain termed a 'horrible blow to me' – allowed others to voice their concerns.<sup>218</sup> A rejection of Hitler's terms carried with it the threat of war. Maugham pointed out that it now all came down to 'power'. What was needed was a consideration of how the British could save the Czechs. Here, Soviet Russia was an important consideration. It was evident that there was little confidence in Soviet capabilities. Maugham termed Soviet Russia 'useless', and Sir Kingsley Wood, the secretary of state for air, said that Britain would be supported by 'a weak Russia and a doubtful France'. Those in favour of a stronger line thus found themselves required to argue, as Cooper did, that in 'great moral issues' there was 'no time to weigh out one's strength too carefully'. This allowed Chamberlain to push the Cabinet into making no decision until the French were consulted that afternoon.

In the late evening of 25 September, the Cabinet reconvened.<sup>219</sup> At the afternoon meetings, the French had been resolute both in their rejection of Hitler's plan and in their determination to resort to force of arms if necessary. Both had been contested by Chamberlain at every turn. The prime minister wished instead to send Hitler a letter, albeit one that did not 'threaten' any action by Britain should Hitler reject its terms. Over the objections of Cooper, this was agreed to at the evening session, and the letter duly sent. All would await the reply. By 27 September, Hitler had refused to accept any compromise, trenches were being dug in Hyde Park and war seemed imminent, setting the stage for frantic last-minute bargaining on 28 September and Chamberlain's dramatic flight to Munich. By 30 September, the deal was done, and Chamberlain returned home to a euphoric reception.

The principal issue of historical debate in Anglo-Soviet affairs concerning the Munich crisis is whether Soviet Russia would have honoured its commitment to Prague had the Western Powers taken a firm stand.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>217</sup> The remainder of this paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Minutes, Cab 43 (38), 25 Sept 1938 in the morning, Cab 23/95.

<sup>218</sup> Halifax's undated note at the Cabinet meeting and N. Chamberlain's reply, Halifax Papers A4.410.3.7.

<sup>219</sup> Cab 44(38), minutes, 25 Sept 1938, Cab 23/95.

<sup>220</sup> Igor Lukes, 'Did Stalin Desire War in 1938? A New Look at Soviet Behaviour During the May and September Crises', *D&S*, 2, 1 (1991), 3–54; G. Jukes, 'The Red Army and the Munich Crisis', *JCH*, 26 (1991), 195–214; Igor Lukes, 'Stalin and Beneš at the End of September 1938: New Evidence from the Prague Archives', *SR*, 52, 1 (1993), 28–48; Lukes, 'Stalin and Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939: An Autopsy of a Myth', *D&S*, 10, 2–3 (1999), 13–47; Hugh Ragsdale, 'Soviet Military Preparations and Policy in the Munich Crisis: New Evidence', *JbfGOE*, 47, 2 (1999), 210–26; Zara Steiner, 'The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New



What is clear, however, is that most of the British did not believe that it would (or could) do so. The impact of the Purges had eliminated the British belief, which had been built up in the period from 1933 to 1937, in Soviet strength, and had replaced it with a conviction that Soviet Russia was unable to do anything concrete to aid the Czechs. This attitude was evident not just at Munich, but earlier, during the May crisis. This combined nicely with British suspicions about Moscow's intentions to use the crisis for its own ends and ensured that Maisky's and Litvinov's professions of support were discounted. The British attitude was encapsulated in a minute in the aftermath of the Munich settlement. Commenting on remarks made by the Turkish minister for foreign affairs that 'Soviet Russia desired nothing better than to stand aloof, if a European conflagration broke out, and to watch the European nations destroying each other' and that the Soviets had 'given no intimation that Soviet Russia would come to Czechoslovakia's aid, unless France had first done so', Frank Roberts noted: 'The Turks seem to have summed up the Russian attitude correctly & confirm our previous estimates.'<sup>221</sup>

The Munich crisis produced a vicious circle of contingency. The Soviets claimed that they would come in *if* the French did; the French claimed they would come in *if* the British supported them; and the British claimed that they would have aided the Czechs *if* the Soviets and French had been willing to save and capable of saving Prague.<sup>222</sup> But no one was willing to bell the German cat. To use a phrase often bandied about at the time, the British were not going to pull the French and Soviet chestnuts out of the fire. In this 'war of the chestnuts', neither the British nor the French believed in the Soviets' professions of support or in their capacity to carry them out.<sup>223</sup> The result was that all parties could blame another: the French could claim that the 'English governess'

Material from the Soviet Archives', *HJ*, 42, 3 (1999), 751–79; Michael Jabara Carley, 1939. *The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), 35–81; Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union 1937–1939* (London and Portland, OR 2003), 38–40; and Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II* (Cambridge, 2004). Interpretations vary widely.

<sup>221</sup> Morgan (Istanbul) to FO, disp 483, 24 Sept 1938, FO 371/21777/C11208/5302/18, minute (1 Oct), Roberts.

<sup>222</sup> Martin Thomas, 'France and the Czechoslovak Crisis', *D&S*, 10, 2–3 (1999), 122–59; Yvon Lacaze, 'Daladier, Bonnet and the Decision-Making Process During the Munich Crisis, 1938', in Robert Boyce, ed., *French Foreign and Defence Policy, 1918–1940* (London and New York, 1998), 215–33; Jonathan Haslam, 'The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovakian Crisis of 1938', *JCH*, 14, 3 (1979), 441–62.

<sup>223</sup> Thomas, 'France and the Czechoslovak Crisis'; Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, 237, 290–2; Maurice Vaisse, 'La Perception de la puissance soviétique par la militaires français en 1938', *Revue Historique des Armées*, 23 (1983), 19–25.

had paralysed them, the British could assert that French and Soviet weakness meant that Czechoslovakia was doomed and Soviet Russia could assume the role of the virtuous second let down by the capitalist appeasers.

From his appointment as prime minister until the end of the Munich crisis, Neville Chamberlain had carried out the strategic foreign policy that he preferred.<sup>224</sup> He had disengaged Britain from the eastern European complications produced by the Franco-Soviet Pact and France's other treaty commitments in that region. Instead, he had attempted to come to terms with Hitler and Mussolini, all the while increasing Britain's Home Defence Air Force and anti-aircraft capabilities (first undermining and then ending preparations to send an expeditionary force to the continent). In the Far East, he had been blocked from pursuing a similar policy by Tokyo's ongoing assaults against China. This meant that British interests in China had been protected by China's ability to absorb Japan's energy (the policy of 'stalemate') and the United States's potential and Soviet Russia's actual military capability in the region. He had turned his back on the League (although continuing to pay public lip-service to its ideals) and on any collaboration with Soviet Russia.

This policy had paid few dividends. Despite the signing of the Anglo-Italian Pact on 16 April (the so-called Easter Pact), Italy had refused to withdraw its troops from Spain, and the pact remained unratified. Hitler had shown himself without gratitude for colonial offers, and had taken the Sudetenland without regard for British sensibilities. Japan had proved unrelenting in its predations in China, despite every British effort not to offend it. Masked by the euphoria surrounding the avoidance of war at Munich was the fact that Chamberlain's policy had been largely barren. What remained was either further appeasement or a move towards establishing a balance of power. France had little choice but to take what it could get from Britain, but would Soviet Russia be prepared to accept anything that fell short of protecting its own interests?

<sup>224</sup> Erik Goldstein, 'Neville Chamberlain, the British Official Mind and the Munich Crisis', *D&S*, 10, 2-3 (1999), 276-92.

## 7 Chamberlain as Buridan's ass: October 1938–September 1939

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In the eleven months from the Munich settlement to the outbreak of war in Europe, there were two principal alternatives for British strategic defence policy. The first was Neville Chamberlain's approach. In Europe, this amounted to continued concessions to the dictator states (appeasement by another name), but this strategy was limited, both by the fact that there were fewer and fewer concessions left to give and by the fact that it showed no signs of achieving its goals.<sup>1</sup> In the Far East, it meant accommodation with Japan, but Tokyo's continued aggression meant that accommodation was hard to effect without alienating both public opinion and the United States. The second alternative was to take up arms in conjunction with others and oppose the revisionist Powers. But would Chamberlain accept this? And would the other Powers adhere to such a British policy after years of being snubbed or fobbed off with excuses? France, certainly, had few alternatives, but Soviet Russia had two: it could either retreat into isolation or mend its fences with Germany.

Chamberlain's freedom of action was less during this period than it had been before Munich. Although only Duff Cooper had resigned after Munich, the Cabinet was more restive than before, and small 'groups' of parliamentarians – Eden's 'glamour boys' (now led by Leo Amery) and Churchill's supporters – who disliked Chamberlain's foreign policy had formed.<sup>2</sup> These 'groups' were not coherent in any political sense and had to act carefully to escape the wrath of a vindictive prime minister, but

<sup>1</sup> Chamberlain continued to appease Italy in the Mediterranean; however, the Italians were turning towards Germany: Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads. Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935–1940* (Ithaca and London, 2002), 73–108.

<sup>2</sup> John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London, 1989), 143–53; N. J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism. The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935–1940* (London and New York, 1997), 99–102; Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth. Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London, 1989), 101–2; Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler. British Politics and British Policy 1933–1940* (Cambridge, 1975), 249–53.

they constituted a reservoir of discontent.<sup>3</sup> Eden contented himself with frequenting London's clubland, where supporters 'kept pumping sedition into his ear'.<sup>4</sup>

The prime minister was well aware of this discontent.<sup>5</sup> Typically, he felt himself the victim (rather than the author) of these circumstances. 'Sometimes I feel that I wish democracy', he wrote on 17 December after a trying week in the House, 'at the devil and I often wonder what PM ever had to go through such an ordeal as I.' He resented the fact that he had to face a myriad of parliamentary questions, and that 'each is followed by two or three supplementaries prepared beforehand in the hope of tripping me with some imprudent declaration and always with the object of injuring my foreign policy'. Chamberlain's woes were compounded by the fact that he received little support. My 'own followers are continually harassing me with warnings & doubts', he lamented.<sup>6</sup> To remedy this, he earlier had attempted to buttress his Cabinet. In late October, Runciman was asked to rejoin that body. Chamberlain's approach to his former colleague made clear the change since 1937. The prime minister told Runciman that the latter could serve in 'some capacity congenial to yourself'.<sup>7</sup> Other changes were not impressive. A disappointed office-seeker shrewdly contended that this was due to the fact that the prime minister felt 'that the more dullards he has in high places, the easier it will be for him to run the show as he likes'.<sup>8</sup>

This was the political context for Anglo-Soviet relations after Munich.<sup>9</sup> On 29 September, Halifax attempted to ensure that Moscow should not 'misinterpret' Chamberlain's proceedings at Munich. The foreign secretary pointed out that Soviet Russia had not been asked to participate at Munich simply because the Germans and Italians 'would not be willing in present circumstances to sit in conference with Soviet representatives'. However, he also told Maisky that Britain was 'fully

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jones to Abraham Flexner (director, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton), 30 Oct 1938, in T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950* (London, 1954), 418-19; N. J. Crowson, 'Conservative Parliamentary Dissent over Foreign Policy During the Premiership of Neville Chamberlain: Myth or Reality?', *Parliamentary History*, 14, 3 (1995), 315-36.

<sup>4</sup> Crawford diary entry, 2 Nov 1938, in John Vincent, ed., *The Crawford Papers. The Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871-1940 During the Years 1892 to 1940* (Manchester, 1984), 590.

<sup>5</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 11 Dec 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1079.

<sup>6</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 17 Dec 1938, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1080.

<sup>7</sup> Chamberlain to Runciman, 20 Oct 1938, Runciman Papers, WR 289.

<sup>8</sup> Headlam diary entry, 28 Oct 1938, in Stuart Ball, ed., *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee. The Headlam Diaries 1935-1951* (Cambridge, 1999), 142.

<sup>9</sup> See Donald Lammers, 'From Whitehall After Munich: The Foreign Office and the Future Course of British Policy', *HJ*, 16, 4 (1973), 831-56.

alive to the importance of working as closely as we might with his Government'. Halifax characterized Maisky's attitude as 'one of some suspicion, but not one of resentment', but the differences were deep.<sup>10</sup> This was revealed on 11 October. Maisky complained about public utterances in Britain asserting that Moscow had made only vague promises of help during the Munich crisis due to its 'military weakness'. He maintained that Litvinov had made the Soviet willingness to help clear. But, when Maisky stated that 'he was at a loss to understand why we failed so completely to appreciate the necessity of checking these methods of aggression before it was too late', Halifax's reply highlighted the differences between them:

I told him that I very well understood the point of view of his Government but that the philosophy that he had outlined suggested the necessity of having a war with Germany every 15 to 20 years to prevent worse things happening. That seemed to me to spell certain disaster for Europe and if indeed there was no other way but that we might as well all abandon hope.

Maisky's response was that the Soviet government was 'confident that, if the kind of action they favoured had been taken, war could, in fact, have been prevented'.<sup>11</sup>

What about Litvinov and Soviet policy? And how did this play into the Franco-Soviet relationship and British strategic foreign policy? The Soviet foreign minister had been 'highly incensed' at the Munich settlement, and told Bonnet that Hitler had 'bluffed' the British and French. For his part, the French foreign minister was less than amused by what he termed 'the Soviets' pretension to dictate French foreign policy', and had 'smiled when he referred to the probable extent of Soviet help had war broken out'.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Bonnet was reported to believe that France must re-evaluate its relations with both Soviet Russia and Poland. This occasioned comment at the Foreign Office. Sargent declared that it was 'curious that it should have taken 2 1/2 years for a realistic and logical people like the French to appreciate such an obvious fact' that Franco-Soviet relations needed to be reconsidered. He went on to say that, if France were to abandon its 'active and positive' policy in Europe and become 'more or less isolated and without continental allies', then the Anglo-French condominium over Europe that had existed since 1919

<sup>10</sup> Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 29 Sept 1938, in disp 608 to Chilton, FO 371/21743/C11100/1941/18; Michael Jabara Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade": Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939', *E-AS*, 45, 2 (1993), 311-12.

<sup>11</sup> Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 11 Oct 1938, in disp 628 to Chilton, FO 371/21745/C12100/1941/38.

<sup>12</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 645, 1 Oct 1938, FO 371/21778/C11379/5302/18.

would have to be abandoned. This would mean that 'our influence and authority will be correspondingly reduced', but would have the countervailing advantage of lessening 'our commitments' and influencing 'the character and extent of our re-armament'. Cadogan largely agreed. He pointed out that '[b]oth we and France will have to be on the defensive for some time to come, and during that time we shall not be able (we may never again be able) to direct affairs in Central & Eastern Europe as we aspired to do in the "Covenant" years'. Vansittart opposed Sargent *tout court*. 'If we and the French are really to fall apart into some sort of isolation or bisolation', the chief diplomatic adviser pronounced, 'we shall not long be even second-class powers. And if we aren't going to try to hold even that rank, any "extent" of our rearmament will be wasted.'<sup>13</sup> Much depended on how Britain, France and Soviet Russia faced the new circumstances.

This required information about Moscow's intentions. A new course in Soviet policy was felt 'most improbable' by Chilston, and he felt that Litvinov's position, although shaken, was likely secure, as he was 'irreplaceable'. However, it was evident that there was 'bitter disappointment' in Moscow over the policy taken by Paris and London. As a result, Collier believed that the Soviet government 'would like more than ever to pursue a policy of isolation if they could safely do so, [but] they realise that, after Munich, they can afford to risk isolation even less than they could before'.<sup>14</sup> News from France, where Phipps reported that the Soviets, 'far from seeking to denounce their Pact with France, are showing an almost feverish desire to maintain it fully, as they dread a German attack on the Ukraine', supported this interpretation. As always, Sargent disliked any strengthening of Franco-Soviet ties. His views had not changed since 1936:

Would it, I wonder, strengthen their [French] hands if we were to tell them that we consider that in the altered circumstances of today they ought not to continue [to be] tied by their Russian Treaty in as much as it can in future only constitute a dangerous liability for France, all the more dangerous because if they did get involved in a war with Germany in defence of Russia they clearly could not count upon the collaboration of Great Britain as they were able to do in the recent case of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>13</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 675, 12 Oct 1938, FO 371/21612/C12161/1050/17, minutes, Sargent (17 Oct), Cadogan (17 Oct), Vansittart (18 Oct), all seen by Halifax (18 Oct). Halifax reported this to Cabinet: minutes, Cab 49(38), 19 Oct 1938, Cab 23/96. See also Vansittart's untitled memo for Halifax, 20 Oct 1938, Halifax Papers, FO 800/314.

<sup>14</sup> Chilston to FO, disp 442, 18 Oct 1938, FO 371/22289/N5164/97/38, minute, Collier (28 Oct). Maisky also made this latter point: Thomas Jones to Lady Grigg, 5 Nov 1938, in T. Jones, *Diary with Letters*, 419.

Cadogan poured cold water on this idea. The obverse side was that, 'if repudiation of the Franco-Soviet Treaty would in fact reduce French security, that w[oul]d put a greater burden on us, or at least render it less unlikely that we shall have to implement our guarantee to France'. For his part, Halifax wanted to see if Franco-German relations showed any sign of improvement 'before taking any action ourselves'.<sup>15</sup>

This reflected the fact that he and Chamberlain were still following, as the prime minister told the Cabinet on 31 October, a policy of 'appease-appeasement', which meant that Britain 'must aim at establishing relations with the Dictator Powers which will lead to a settlement in Europe and to a sense of stability'.<sup>16</sup> One aspect of this was to ratify the 'Easter Accord' in an attempt to 'liberate Signor Mussolini by degrees from the pressure to which he was subjected from Berlin'.<sup>17</sup> This was done on 16 November and led to Chamberlain's visit to Rome early in 1939. The continuation of appeasement had ramifications for Britain's diplomatic position, particularly with regard to France (and, indirectly, Soviet Russia). Halifax outlined his views to Phipps on 1 November.<sup>18</sup> In the foreign secretary's opinion, 'assured peace in Europe' could result only from 'genuine agreement' among Britain, France and Germany. 'One of the chief difficulties of the past' in achieving this had been 'the unreal position which France was occupying in Central and Eastern Europe', as this had been a 'continual irritant to Germany'. Now, in the aftermath of Munich and with the 'drastic change in French policy in Central Europe', Halifax believed that 'Franco-German relations should have a fresh start'.

The implications for British strategic foreign policy were twofold: Germany would be predominant in 'Central Europe' and Britain and France 'have to uphold *their* predominant position in Western Europe', all the while 'firmly maintain[ing] their hold on the Mediterranean and the Near East'. Further, the two countries 'should also keep a tight hold

<sup>15</sup> Phipps to FO, tel 686, 20 Oct 1938, FO 371/21600/C12637/55/17, minutes, Sargent (22 Oct), Cadogan (24 Oct) and Halifax (25 Oct).

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, Cab 51(38), 31 Oct 1938, Cab 23/96. Attitudes to Germany would change over the next four months: Bruce Strang, 'Two Unequal Tempers: Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Sir Nevile Henderson and British Foreign Policy, 1938-1939', *D&S*, 5, 1 (1994), 107-37; Peter Neville, 'Rival Foreign Office Perceptions of Germany 1936-1939', *D&S*, 13, 3 (2002), 145-9.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, Cab 50(38), 26 Oct 1938, Cab 23/96; 'The Anglo-Italian Agreement', CP 231(38), most secret, Halifax, 21 Oct 1938, Cab 24/279; William C. Mills, 'Sir Joseph Ball, Adrian Dingli, and Neville Chamberlain's "Secret Channel" to Italy, 1937-1940', *IHR*, 24, 2 (2002), 307-9.

<sup>18</sup> The remainder of this and the following two paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on Halifax to Phipps, 1 Nov 1938, Phipps Papers, PHPP 1/21.

on their Colonial Empires and maintain the closest possible ties with the United States of America'. For this reason, Halifax welcomed any Franco-German *rapprochement*. He downplayed any possible negative consequences: he felt that France would not accept 'a direct non-aggression agreement with Germany, in return for which she would drop the Franco-Soviet pact and would receive a guarantee of her overseas possessions'. More likely was that France might 'turn so defeatist' that it would not defend itself; this was to be avoided by Britain's 'using every opportunity of encouraging her by precept and example to rearm as soon as possible'.<sup>19</sup>

What would be the result of this 'time of more or less painful readjustments to the new realities of Europe' for Soviet Russia? Halifax's assumptions were evident:

Soviet Russia, on the other hand, can scarcely become the ally of Germany so long as Hitler lives . . . she may choose to go into isolation or else she may prefer to maintain contact with the Western Powers through the French alliance . . . Subject only to the consideration that I should hope France would protect herself – and us – from being entangled by Russia in a war with Germany, I should hesitate to advise the French Government to denounce the Franco-Soviet Pact as the future is still far too uncertain!

'Russia', Halifax concluded, 'for good or evil, is part of Europe and we cannot ignore her existence.'

In the Far East, the repercussions of Munich were more muted. In late August and early September, reports from the Tokyo embassy made clear that, once Japan was able to free itself from being tied down in China (and able to secure its border with Soviet Russia), Tokyo would drive southwards. Cadogan saw the dilemma for British policy clearly:

The fact is that we are faced, as on the other side of the world, with a situation not unlike the one that confronts us here . . . And the problem, fundamentally, is the same: are we to fight Japan now, and prevent her possible accession of strength, or wait for a possible war later? . . . It is as difficult to find the answer to our Far Eastern problem as it is to the European one.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Halifax was wrong: Peter Jackson, 'Intelligence and the End of Appeasement', in Robert Boyce, ed., *French Foreign and Defence Policy, 1918–1940* (London and New York, 1998), 234–60; Talbot Imlay, 'Retreat or Resistance: Strategic Re-Appraisal and the Crisis of French Power in Eastern Europe, September 1938 to August 1939', in Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander, eds., *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918–1962* (New York and Oxford, 2002), 105–31.

<sup>20</sup> Craigie to FO, disp 686, 9 Sept 1938, FO 371/22185/F10299/152/23, Cadogan's minute (10 Oct). During July and early August, there had been a major clash: Paul W. Doerr, 'The Changkufeng/Lake Khasan Incident of 1938: British Intelligence on Soviet and Japanese Military Performance', *INS*, 5, 3 (1990), 184–99.



Craigie's policy of coming to terms with Japan was difficult. While the new Japanese government continued to drop hints that Anglo-Japanese collaboration was possible, this could be had only on Japanese terms. And Japan had other options.<sup>21</sup> One was to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>22</sup> At the Foreign Office, such an eventuality was thought to be 'directed against Soviet Russia' rather than against Britain. But the value of Moscow for British policy in the Far East was believed to be diminished.

By the end of October, with the euphoria of Munich still in the London air and the Anglo-Italian negotiations near completion, a new direction in the Far East was considered. It was suggested that London try to use Britain's supposedly improved relations with the Germans and Italians to ease the tensions in the Far East.<sup>23</sup> This approach resulted from new thinking. First, there was the common view at the Foreign Office that 'in Japan Munich appeared in the light of a knock out blow to Russia's influence in Central Europe and as a proof of the incurable vacillation if not actual impotence of France and Great Britain'.<sup>24</sup> Second, there was the linked fear that Britain was simultaneously losing influence with China (due to not giving it a loan) and irritating Japan (due to rejecting its overtures and giving support to China).<sup>25</sup> But this was a difficult matter. Cadogan put the problem clearly on 10 November:

We probably could not combine it [co-operation with Germany and Italy] with cooperation with the US in the Far East. The US Govt will not gladly cooperate with the Dictators. We must try to work with the latter here & with the US in the Far East.

Halifax agreed with this suggestion, and asked for practical advice about how to proceed.

Such advice came from N. B. Ronald, a senior clerk in the Far Eastern Department. He suggested that the United States might be willing to 'swallow their ideological scruples' to achieve a settlement in the Far East without resorting to far-reaching economic sanctions (about which

<sup>21</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 1146, 3 Oct 1938, FO 371/22185/F10438/152/23, minutes.

<sup>22</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 1151, 4 Oct 1938, FO 371/22185/F10479/152/23, minutes.

<sup>23</sup> The remainder of this and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on Craigie to FO, tel 1300, 3 Nov 1938, minutes, FO 371/22186/F11672/152/23; minutes, Cab 55(38), 16 Nov 1938, Cab 23/96; Howe's minute, 14 Oct, on Clark Kerr to FO, tel 1462, 12 Oct 1939, FO 371/22055/F10731/16/10. 'Borodin' refers to Mikhail Borodin, who was the Comintern's emissary to the Chinese Communist Party, 1923-7.

<sup>24</sup> Minute (7 Nov), Ronald, on Craigie to FO, disp 779, 7 Oct 1938, FO 371/22185/F11368/152/23; cf. Howe's minute, 17 Oct, on Clark Kerr to FO, tel 1469, 13 Oct 1939, FO 371/22053/F10827/13/10.

<sup>25</sup> Untitled memo, Howe, 10 Oct 1938, FO 371/22110/F10649/84/10.

the Americans had enquired on 3 November, but which the Cabinet had rejected as too risky).<sup>26</sup> Ronald recommended that Craigie sound out the American ambassador at Tokyo. As for the Germans, he advocated an approach emphasizing that there was sufficient trade in China for all, that there needed to be some concrete results flowing from the Munich settlement, and that

neither of us wishes to see China again run by 'Borodins'. The German Government seem to think that the best way to keep the 'Borodins' out is by making anti-Comintern pacts. We think that they are best kept out by helping China to be peaceful and prosperous, for when she is in this condition she is in our view less likely to be subject to violent convulsions over a political theory.

This was a radical change of position, and one in which Soviet Russia had been replaced by Germany as an element in the delicate balance that maintained Britain's position in the Far East. It did not come to pass. Craigie warned that Anglo-American co-operation in the Far East depended 'not so much [on] a community of interests, as [on] a community of ideals'.<sup>27</sup> Any truck with the Germans might serve to diminish the American belief that the latter existed, to Britain's detriment. In any case, by the beginning of 1939, strengthened Anglo-German relations were revealed to be a chimera, and, as the possibility of improvement vanished, so, too, did the new initiative in the Far East.

The mention of the Anti-Comintern Pact, however, requires more examination. On 15 November, there was a report from Moscow that the anti-Comintern was about to become a 'tripartite military alliance'.<sup>28</sup> This report was confirmed by 'information in the Secret papers', and Sargent wrote a long analysis, based on deciphered telegrams. The key element was that the new pact was directed 'against any third Power, instead of against the Soviet Government alone'. As a result, Sargent suggested that Japan's 'more truculent' attitude of late – including Konoe's announcement on 3 November of the 'new order' in Asia – might be due not just to successes in China and 'the alleged collapse of the Western democracies at Munich', but also to a belief 'that the projected tripartite agreement is certain to eventuate and can be relied on to place Japan beyond any need for showing respect or consideration for Great Britain or France, or even the USA'.<sup>29</sup> This was troubling for

<sup>26</sup> Minutes, Cab 54(38), 9 Nov 1938, Cab 23/96.

<sup>27</sup> Craigie to Howe, 29 Dec 1938, FO 371/23457/F780/87/10, minute, Ashley Clarke (1 Feb 1939).

<sup>28</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 191, 19 Nov 1938, FO 371/21639/C14209/14208/62, minute, Sargent (22 Nov).

<sup>29</sup> Untitled memo, Sargent, 19 Nov 1938, and Sargent to Ogilvie-Forbes, 6 Dec 1938, both FO 371/21639/C14523/14209/62.

the British, and helped to push Halifax back towards the idea of pursuing a 'stalemate' in China by providing that country with as much help as possible, including a loan.<sup>30</sup> Soviet Russia was increasingly being ignored.

What of Anglo-Soviet relations? In the autumn of 1938, they were minimal. The focus was on observing Moscow's interactions with other states. In late October, there was a discussion about the future of the Franco-Soviet Pact. One stream of the discussion flowed from an argument posited by Robert Coulondre, the French ambassador at Moscow. He contended that Berlin could persuade the Poles to return the Polish corridor to Germany if Warsaw were in turn allowed to take territory from Lithuania. The French fear was that Soviet Russia, with German acquiescence, might then attack Poland, pitting two French allies against one another. This concern reflected, London felt, the fact that Coulondre, 'like so many other Frenchmen, is obsessed by the bogey of a Soviet-German rapprochement'. However, Collier was blunt: 'I think it quite possible that the Russians would acquiesce in a German attack on Poland; but I agree that there is a contradiction between that idea & the one of a "deal" over the corridor & Lithuania.'<sup>31</sup> In contrast to this gloomy prospect was a report from Paris that Hitler no longer seemed obsessed with the idea that 'the Franco-Soviet Pact should be scrapped'.<sup>32</sup>

The entire issue of Franco-Soviet relations had been discussed with the French on 24 November.<sup>33</sup> Halifax had reiterated the undesirability of 'tak[ing] any action which appeared to give Russia the cold shoulder', but had found that the French 'were rather anxious to disentangle themselves from the Russian connection'.<sup>34</sup> In the Cabinet discussions of this meeting on 30 November, Chamberlain noted that Germany would not agree to anything 'which allowed Russia to be associated with Czechoslovakia', and Hoare added 'that we should avoid, if possible, a position in which we might find ourselves asked to take action with France and Russia against Germany and Italy on behalf' of Czechoslovakia. Domestic considerations suggested that no pressure should be put on Prague to 'abandon' the Soviet guarantee, and the

<sup>30</sup> 'Japanese policy towards China', Brennan, 29 Nov 1938, FO 371/22110/F13096/84/10, minutes, Howe (14 Dec), Mounsey (16 Dec), Cadogan (23 Dec) and Halifax (25 Dec); minutes, Cab 60(38), 21 Dec 1938, Cab 23/96.

<sup>31</sup> Chilston to Collier, 26 Oct 1938, FO 371/22301/N5433/5433/38, minutes.

<sup>32</sup> Phipps to Halifax, 1 Nov 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

<sup>33</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is based on minutes, Cab 57(38), 30 Nov 1938, Cab 23/96; 'Visit of British Ministers to Paris', CP 269(38), 26 Nov 1938, Cab 24/280.

<sup>34</sup> Also Phipps to Halifax, 5 Dec 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

Cabinet concluded only that the Czechs should be consulted about such a guarantee. But, with the French no longer enamoured of their pact with Moscow, with opinion in the Cabinet firm that entanglements in eastern Europe should be steered clear of and with policy still firmly fixed on improving relations with the dictator states, Soviet support was not considered vital.

Collier did not share this view. He had a far more pessimistic opinion of German policy. Commenting on the likelihood of the Germans setting up a puppet government in Russia after some future military victory there, he was gloomy about its effect on Britain. 'Whether such a regime would last long', he wrote on the same day as the Cabinet considered the Anglo-French discussions, 'is, of course, doubtful; but it might well last long enough to enable Germany to control Russian resources at the critical period of their relations with us – which will come, in my opinion, as soon as they have gained their immediate objectives in Eastern Europe.'<sup>35</sup> The signing of an agreement in late November, marking a *détente* between Poland and Soviet Russia, did not relieve his pessimism. 'I should think that the only practical result of this', Collier remarked, 'will be to hasten the German onslaught on Poland . . . a Polish–Russian *rapprochement*, even if it goes much further than this, is not likely, as far as I can see, to save the Poles from the consequences of their past follies'.<sup>36</sup> This line of thought flowed from his view of Soviet–German relations. Collier did not feel that the rumours of a *rapprochement* between Berlin and Moscow could

mean very much, as I do not see how they could fit in with Germany's general policy, nor how they could be explained to the Japanese, for example; but I suppose it is just conceivable that Hitler may have authorised these approaches as a means of keeping the Russians quiet while he deals with Poland.<sup>37</sup>

It was time to consider how such a dismal future either could be avoided or be shaped to Britain's advantage.

This took place early in 1939 and centred on a memorandum prepared by Harold Caccia, one of Halifax's assistant private secretaries.<sup>38</sup> The future PUS stated that Britain's attitude towards Soviet Russia during the Munich crisis had been based on 'a desire not to exacerbate

<sup>35</sup> Collier's minute (30 Nov) on Sir G. Werner (Berne) to Collier, 23 Nov 1938, FO 371/22301/N5797/5433/38.

<sup>36</sup> Collier's minute (28 Nov) on Vereker (*chargé d'affaires*, Moscow) to FO, tel 194, 27 Nov 1938, FO 371/22294/N5802/209/38.

<sup>37</sup> Collier to Lt-Col N. C. D. Brownjohn (MI2, WO), 2 Jan 1938, FO 371/371/22299/N6201/924/38.

<sup>38</sup> This and the following four paragraphs are based on untitled memo, Caccia, 3 Jan 1939, FO 371/23677/N57/57/38, minutes.

the Germans and make a peaceful solution of our difficulties harder, if not impossible'. That policy had collapsed, and it was now time to reconsider Anglo-Soviet relations. He suggested that Hitler would now pursue one of two policies: first, he might attack Ukraine; second, he might attack Britain and France. In the first instance, Hitler would endeavour to use the Anti-Comintern Pact to keep Britain and France 'fully occupied (e.g. in Palestine, the Mediterranean and the Far East)'. In the second, Britain and France's full attention would be engaged by events. In both instances, however, 'we should naturally have much to gain by having clarified our relations with Russia before Hitler moved'. The replacement of Chilston as ambassador by Sir William Seeds, Caccia asserted, might prove a useful opportunity to begin such a determination.

Opinions varied at the Foreign Office. Opposition was found in a perceptive minute by Lascelles. He argued that Caccia's suggestion could lead to no practical end, particularly as Britain was not in a position to offer concrete assistance to Moscow:

Essentially, these [Anglo-Soviet] relations are based on a mutual and inevitable antipathy and on the realisation that the other party, in attempting to cope with the German menace, will act empirically and solely with an eye to its own interests.

In such circumstances, approaching Stalin would result either in his asserting that Soviet Russia was 'an invincible fortress' or in his threatening that, if Britain stayed aloof when Soviet Russia was attacked by Germany, Moscow would 'have to come to terms with the Nazis'. Neither reply would offer an opening for discussions, and Stalin 'would not be such a fool' as to admit that he might envisage an arrangement with Germany.

Collier agreed in broad terms, but struck a more subtle note. Caccia's proposals were aimed at finding out Stalin's views and making the Germans 'think twice' before attacking British interests. Collier felt that the British policy of 'keeping the Russians at arms' [sic] length' during the Munich crisis had 'gratuitously advertised to Hitler and Mussolini & the Japanese that they can deal with each of us in isolation'. He then added:

I think there is something to be said for giving Stalin at least a negative assurance that we will do nothing directly or indirectly to assist Hitler's eastern plans. Although this may seem superfluous to us, who are conscious of the rectitude of our intentions, and although M. Litvinov with his experience of foreign politicians may know the facts well enough, it is by no means certain that the Soviet Government as a whole, and Stalin in particular, do not really share the

suspicions of our present policy which are so often expressed in the Soviet press; and, if they do, the declaration might have some value in their eyes and might even help to some small extent to stiffen their attitude towards the Japanese, for example, which would be obviously to our advantage.

Collier proposed to link such talks with Stalin to negotiations for a new Anglo-Soviet commercial agreement.

Other members of the Foreign Office took sides. Ashton-Gwatkin, noted that 'Russia is no friend of ours', and criticized its foreign policy of the past years, but concluded that 'she remains a very important make-weight in the uncertain balance of Europe'. Strang was brief: 'I am in full agreement with Mr Collier's minute.' Lascelles was supported in opposition by Oliphant, who reiterated the former's points. Cadogan feared that, if the British initiated conversations, 'we sh[oul]d very soon have to disclose the emptiness of our cupboard' as to what Britain could offer Soviet Russia. It was easy to say that Britain would not give any 'direct' help to Hitler, but Stalin might ask 'as [to] whether "no indirect assistance" means standing out and giving Germany a free hand. And that is not an easy question to answer – at least I do not think we c[oul]d give Stalin the answer he wants.' Thus, Cadogan came down on the side of Oliphant.

This divergence of opinion was too much for Halifax. On 18 January, he asked Vansittart to adjudicate. Vansittart, as always, used the opportunity to ventilate his own views:

Anglo-Russian relations are in a most unsatisfactory state. It is not only regrettable but dangerous that they should be in this state, and a continuance of it will become a great deal more dangerous very shortly. They are in a bad state because the Russians feel, and I think it is an incontestable fact (at any rate it is a very widely stated one), that we practically boycotted them during 1938. We never took them into our confidence or endeavoured to establish close contact with them, and this fact accounts for the gradual drift towards isolation that is going on in Russia. That fact and that tendency we ought to correct and correct soon.

This put Vansittart firmly in Caccia and Collier's camp, but Vansittart felt that Seeds's appointment was not the opportune moment to try to implement a new policy. Instead, for tactical reasons, he suggested that a high-ranking politician should go to Soviet Russia. 'The visit would then be a gesture of good will', Vansittart wrote, 'and would be overtly connected with the trade agreement.' Such an approach would eliminate 'awkward political questions and at the same time (and this, I think, is the most important consideration of all and by a very long way) it might and probably would have some deterrent effect on Germany, the aggressor of tomorrow'.

This was connected with the Far East. Early in January, Craigie reported rumours that Japan might attack Soviet Russia in April. Collier doubted whether this would occur, for Japan would then have a war on two fronts. '[T]o make the scheme really worth embarking on', he noted, 'one of two conditions seem necessary: (1) the end of the war in China or (2) a simultaneous attack on Russia in Europe; & April seems too soon for either of these conditions to have been established'.<sup>39</sup> Craigie, supported by Clark Kerr, also called for an increase in Britain's naval presence in the Far East, arguing that it would deter Japan from any adventures against British interests to the south and make it clear to Tokyo that Britain was not entirely dependent on the United States.<sup>40</sup> This spoke to the issue of the defence of the Far East. In the immediate aftermath of Munich, the CID had called upon all branches of the services to outline the weaknesses revealed by the crisis.<sup>41</sup> By 19 October, the Admiralty had come to the conclusion that, due to the 'weakness of our position in the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea and Middle East . . . The emergency has in fact made it more clear than ever that we are at present quite unable to undertake hostilities simultaneously against Germany, Italy and Japan.'<sup>42</sup>

This meant that plans for sending a naval unit (Force Z) to Singapore in the event of hostilities in the Far East were necessarily on hold. In the words of the First Sea Lord, '[a]t the present time we have none to spare, nor shall we have any in 1939', but this was never announced officially.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 26, 10 Jan 1939, FO 371/23558/F347/347/23, minute, Collier (13 Jan).

<sup>40</sup> Craigie to Howe, 15 Dec 1938, Craigie to FO, disp 1016, 14 Dec 1938, both FO 371/23544/F471/471/61, minutes; Clark Kerr to FO, tel 14, 6 Jan 1939, FO 371/23544/F478/471/61, minutes; see also Sir John Crosby (minister, Bangkok), disp 485, 7 Nov 1938, FO 371/22216/F12115/12115/40.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes, 333rd meeting CID, 6 Oct 1938, Cab 2/8.

<sup>42</sup> Untitled and unsigned discussion, 19 Oct 1938, Adm 116/3637; 'Mediterranean, Middle East and North-East Africa Appreciation', COS, 21 Feb 1938, Cab 53/57.

<sup>43</sup> Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse to Vice Admiral Sir Ragnar M. Colvin (First Naval Member, Australian Naval Board), secret, 9 Jan 1939, Adm 205/3. Older literature is introduced in Malcolm H. Murfett, 'Living in the Past: A Critical Re-examination of the Singapore Naval Strategy, 1918–1941', *W&S*, 11, 1 (1993), 73–103; useful subsequent work includes Galen Roger Perras, "'Our Position in the Far East would be Stronger without this Unsatisfactory Commitment': Britain and the Reinforcement of Hong Kong, 1941', *CJH*, 30, 2 (1995), 231–59; Ian Cowman, 'Defence of the Malay Barrier? The Place of the Philippines in Admiralty Naval War Planning, 1925–1941', *WH*, 3, 4 (1996), 398–417; Cowman, 'Main Fleet to Singapore? Churchill, the Admiralty, and Force Z', *JSS*, 18, 1 (1995), 79–93; Christopher Bell, "'Our Most Exposed Outpost": Hong Kong and British Far Eastern Strategy, 1921–1941', *JMilH*, 60, 1 (1996), 61–88; and, most recently, Bell, 'The "Singapore Strategy" and the Deterrence of Japan: Winston Churchill, the Admiralty and the Dispatch of Force Z', *EHR*, 116, 467 (2001), 604–34: A useful recent survey can be found in Malcolm H. Murfett,

The Admiralty's contention that a fleet should not be sent out to the Far East until Japanese aggression occurred and that such a fleet had to be 'equal in size to that of the Japanese fleet' was challenged at the Foreign Office on strategic political grounds, and the Admiralty was asked to reconsider the matter. The reasoning behind the Foreign Office's demurral was that 'latent threats from Soviet Russia and the United States might well suffice to compel the Japanese to retain a certain proportion of their Fleet at home'.<sup>44</sup> Thus, a smaller British fleet would serve to check Japan.<sup>45</sup> The Admiralty's reply had to wait until March, but the issue was clear. Was Britain wholly dependent on Soviet Russia and the United States to defend its interests in the Far East?

While the Admiralty pondered, Craigie's ongoing attempts to persuade London that moderate opinion in Japan favoured a realignment with Britain continued to fall on deaf ears.<sup>46</sup> The belief in London was that a drive to the south by Tokyo was prevented only by 'Japan's increasing commitments in China together with the deterioration of her relations with Soviet Russia'. In fact, southward expansion was felt likely 'only after a successful war with the Soviet Union . . . always provided, of course, that the British Empire and the other Powers concerned remain in a position to oppose a resolute front to Japanese adventure in these regions'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it was not surprising that Craigie's reports that prominent Japanese favoured improved Anglo-Japanese relations were increasingly discounted. The minutes on one of these – 'personally, I find these reports with Japanese officials lacking, on the part of the narrator [that is, Craigie], in that quality which the Americans would describe as "hard boiled"' and, more succinctly,

'Reflections on an Enduring Theme: The "Singapore Strategy" at Sixty', in Brian Farrell and Sandy Hunter, eds., *Sixty Years On. The Fall of Singapore Revisited* (Singapore, 2002), 3–28, along with an overview in Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans. A Military History of Singapore from First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal* (Oxford, 1999), 145–74. Bell's book, *The Royal Navy and Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (London, 2000), and Ong Chit Chung, *Operation Matador. Britain's War Plans Against the Japanese 1918–1941* (Singapore, 1997), are essential for context.

<sup>44</sup> 'Memorandum respecting the proposal to station a British Battle Squadron Permanently at Singapore', Fitzmaurice, 27 Jan 1939, Howe to Adm, 13 Feb 1939, both FO 371/23544/F478/471/61.

<sup>45</sup> See also 'Appreciation of the Situation in the Event of War in April 1939', annex to 'A Combined Intelligence Bureau for the Middle East', JIC 77, WO, 26 Oct 1938, Cab 56/4.

<sup>46</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 26, 10 Jan 1939, FO 371/23558/F347/347/23.

<sup>47</sup> 'Notes on Japanese Southward Expansion', M.E. Dening (FED), nd (but c. 16 Jan 1939), FO 371/23560/F4194/419/23. This was a definitive statement of the FO's views.



'More chloroform!' – indicated the ambassador's lack of credibility at the Foreign Office.<sup>48</sup>

Early in 1939, both Soviet Russia's relations with France and Moscow's role in British strategic foreign policy continued to be analysed. The War Office believed that, while the Franco-Soviet Pact might be of dubious actual value, Soviet Russia still had value as a 'bogey', especially in the Far East. And, in any case, the author thought, 'it seems . . . better to have a bogey up your sleeve than nothing at all!' Opinion at the Horse Guards also believed that 'the Japanese would hesitate to embroil themselves in hostilities with us unless they were *quite* certain that they could count on the inactivity of the Soviets'. The Foreign Office felt that this 'bogey value' was slight, but what else was available? Even the Franco-Soviet Pact, Collier argued, 'had chiefly a negative value, as keeping the Soviet Union from falling out of the "French system", so to speak' and into isolation.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, some conversations with Maisky made this latter concern one to be taken seriously.<sup>50</sup>

In February, the Soviet press criticized both the fascist states and the 'so-called democracies'. There were two interpretations at the Foreign Office. The first was that the Soviets were considering warming relations with Germany; the second was that Moscow was trying to 'frighten' Britain in order to gain advantage in the trade negotiations.<sup>51</sup> This reflected the fact that the Cabinet had decided to reconsider the 1934 Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement despite the lurking hornet's nest of disgruntled bond holders.<sup>52</sup> Collier believed, as he had in 1936, that trade discussions might pave the way for improved political relations.<sup>53</sup> But, no matter what the British did, the legacy of 1938 was difficult to dispel.<sup>54</sup> In interviews with Leith-Ross and Treasury officials in mid-February, and, later, with R. Hudson, the parliamentary secretary at the

<sup>48</sup> Minutes, Brenan (23 Jan 1939) and Howe (27 Jan) on Craigie to FO, disp 1013, 13 Dec 1938, FO 371/23555/F579/176/23.

<sup>49</sup> Lt-Col Brownjohn to Collier, 30 Jan 1939, FO 371/23684/N559/190/38, minutes, Lascelles, Collier (both 2 Feb).

<sup>50</sup> Butler's conversation with Maisky, 3 Feb 1939, FO 371/23677/N669/57/38.

<sup>51</sup> Vereker to Collier, 21 Feb 1939, FO 371/23677/N1029/38, minutes, Lascelles (28 Feb), Collier (1 Mar).

<sup>52</sup> Minutes, Cab 6(39), 8 Feb 1939, Cab 23/97; 'Commercial Relations with the Soviet Union', CP 32(39), Stanley, 1 Feb 1939, Cab 24/283. For the politics, see the minutes on Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 27 Jan 1939, FO 371/23680/N511/92/38, Sargent's untitled memo, 10 Feb 1939, FO 371/23653/N869/64/63, minutes; Henderson to FO, tel 69, 22 Feb 1939, FO 371/23653/N958/64/63, minutes.

<sup>53</sup> 'Notes on C.P. 32(39)', Collier, 7 Feb 1939, FO 371/23681/N734/92/38; Nicolson diary entry, 9 Feb 1939, in N. Nicolson, ed., *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930–1939* (London, 1966), 391.

<sup>54</sup> Amery diary entry, 25 Feb 1939, in J. Barnes and D. Nicholson, eds., *The Empire at Bay. The Leo Amery Diaries 1929–1945* (London, 1988), 543.

Board of Trade, and R. A. Butler, Maisky was suspicious. He wondered aloud whether the British government wished to improve relations with Soviet Russia only to gain Soviet assistance against Germany. Collier found Maisky's suspicions understandable, and anticipated that the economic discussions would be difficult and slow, especially 'if at the same time we show ostentatious friendliness at Berlin, Rome or Tokyo'. Vansittart echoed these sentiments, and emphasized the value of Soviet Russia. He reminded Halifax '(1) that we had both Russia & Italy with us in the last war, & then only just scrambled through (2) that France w[oul]d have had no chance of survival *whatever* in 1914, if there had not been an Eastern front. She only just survived as it was.' For Vansittart, such considerations pointed towards an alliance.<sup>55</sup> This was attractive, and was supported by an earlier suggestion from Seeds in Moscow that Britain should pursue 'an active pro-Chinese and anti-Japanese' policy as a means to 'lure' Soviet Russia into closer relations.<sup>56</sup> But this idea foundered on the simple fact that Britain had no means of providing any concrete support in the Far East, beyond a loan to China (which the Cabinet finally approved on 28 February),<sup>57</sup> and this inducement was felt insufficient to coax Moscow into closer relations.

This returned matters to defence. On 1 March, the newly created Strategic Appreciation Sub-Committee (SAC) of the CID held its first meeting.<sup>58</sup> It attempted to answer the Foreign Office's earlier point about sending ships to the Far East.<sup>59</sup> While Chatfield was adamant that a fleet would be sent, it was evident both that this would require the French to concentrate their efforts in the Mediterranean and that an American presence at Honolulu or Singapore would 'greatly improve' the British position in the Far East. However, the general conclusion of the SAC was that a three-front war was unlikely to be won.

At the Foreign Office, the SAC's discussions were of substantial interest. They underscored both just how complicated British strategic defence policy was and how vital Soviet Russia and the United States were for the defence of the Far East. J. W. Nicholls, who served in the newly created Co-ordination Section (dealing with CID matters) of the

<sup>55</sup> 15 Feb 1939, by S. D. Waley's (Treasury) conversation with Maisky and Leith-Ross, 15 Feb 1939, memo, Leith-Ross, 16 Feb 1939, both FO 371/2368/N878/92/38; Hudson's conversation with Maisky, 8 Mar 1939, FO 371/23677/N1389/57/38, Vansittart's minute (13 Mar); Butler's second conversation with Maisky, 9 Mar 1939, FO 371/23677/N1342/57/38, Collier's minute (16 Mar); Harvey diary entry, 9 Mar 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>56</sup> Seeds to Oliphant, 21 Feb 1939, and reply (20 Mar), FO 371/23697/N1459/1459/38.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes, Cab 8(39), 28 Feb 1939, Cab 23/97.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes, 1st meeting SAC, 1 Mar 1939, Cab 16/209.

<sup>59</sup> 'European Appreciation, 1939-40', COS 843, COS, 20 Feb 1939, Cab 53/45.

Western Department, argued that it was important to 'try & knock' Italy out of the war as soon as possible in order to maintain Britain's diplomatic influence in the Mediterranean. Vansittart agreed, adding that 'I trust that we shall not send any ships to the Far East till we have knocked-out Italy.'<sup>60</sup> This was contentious.<sup>61</sup> Nicholls asserted that no fleet should be sent to the Far East and that British possessions in the latter area should be defended with what was locally available. His reasoning reflected bleak facts: 'a defeat in Europe would mean the defeat of the Empire as a whole . . . [while] a defeat in the Far East could be turned into a victory if we could first assure ourselves of victory at home'.

Fitzmaurice rejected both points. He argued that it was 'quite illusory to suppose . . . that having won the war in Europe we should then be able to recover the lost ground in the Far East'. Having lost Hong Kong and Singapore, Britain would have no *point d'appui* from which to operate, and Japan would acquire resources in South-East Asia that would make it invulnerable to economic pressure. And, he was 'sceptical' that victory in Europe could be won if the Far East were lost. He preferred to support Craigie's idea of sending a small fleet to the Far East in time of peace and, by so doing, providing a deterrent to Japan. The reason was simple: if a fleet were at Singapore, the Japanese

would have to bring practically the whole of their fleet to bear, which it is very unlikely they would in fact do, in view of the possibility of complications with the United States, and even more with Soviet Russia, occurring in the absence of the fleet.

Howe agreed with this line of argument. Nicholls rebutted that the choice was 'between *defeat* in Europe as a whole and abandoning the Far East', and various members of the Egyptian Department emphasized that abandoning the Mediterranean (as Fitzmaurice's argument required) would be catastrophic. These points were raised at the SAC on 13 March, and, there, too, they were not resolved.<sup>62</sup> But the important

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, Nicholls (13 Mar 1939) and Vansittart (16 Mar 1939) on a copy of minutes, 1st meeting SAC, FO 371/23981/W4683/108/50.

<sup>61</sup> The remainder of this and the following paragraph are based on untitled memo, Nicholls, 1 Mar 1939, commenting on COS 843, 'European Appreciation, 1939-40', the minutes by Fitzmaurice (8 Mar), Howe (8 Mar), Nicholls (9 Mar; original emphasis), Kelly (head, Egyptian Department, 13 Mar); 'Probable Effect on British Position in Egypt if a Large Fleet is Sent to the Far East in the Event of War with Japan', Cavendish-Bentinck (Egyptian Department), 18 Mar 1939, all FO 371/23981/W3784/108/50.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, 2nd meeting SAC, 13 Mar 1939, Cab 16/209; 'Despatch of a Fleet to the Far East. Memorandum by the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff', SAC 16, 5 Apr 1939, Cab 16/209, written as a result of the meeting.

conclusion, towards which all discussion pointed, was that the only way to avoid these difficult choices for British strategic foreign policy in the Far East was co-operation with Soviet Russia and the United States. But could this be achieved? In the interim, however, *faute de mieux*, the Foreign Office plumped for defending the Mediterranean, with an eye to knocking out Italy, so as to free up the fleet for subsequent action in the Far East.<sup>63</sup>

While this was going on, Chamberlain's foreign policy tumbled like a house of cards. Despite the prime minister's facile belief after his visit to Rome that Mussolini would 'stand by' the Anglo-Italian agreement, *il Duce* had been unimpressed by Chamberlain.<sup>64</sup> On 4 February, Mussolini moved troops into Libya. But Chamberlain remained oblivious. He continued to believe the promises of dictators, asserting that 'when Germans & Italians declared that they had no territorial ambitions in Spain & would get out as soon as the war was over, they mean what they said & should be believed'. His distrust of the Foreign Office remained: 'Unless the FO are constantly reminded that is & always has been our attitude they are tempted to follow the old Eden line and chortle at the prospect of "defeating Fascist arms"'.<sup>65</sup> In fact, by 19 February, Chamberlain was convinced that everything 'seems to point in the direction of peace and I repeat once more that I believe we have at last got on top of the dictators'.<sup>66</sup>

Hitler's occupation of the rump of Czechoslovakia on 15 March finally ended Chamberlain's delusion. On the 18th, Chamberlain told the Cabinet that Hitler's actions meant that it was now 'impossible to negotiate on the old basis'.<sup>67</sup> Chamberlain's new policy – to the disgust of some, who lamented that Britain must 'be very low in the water indeed' to 'flirt with Russia' – was to sound out Soviet Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Greece and Romania to discover whether they

<sup>63</sup> 'The Arguments for and against the Despatch of a Battle-Fleet to The Far East in War-Time', Nicholls, 15 Mar 1939, and Palairat (at the direction of Cadogan and Halifax) to Adm, 22 Mar 1939, both FO 371/23981/W4831/108/50.

<sup>64</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 15 Jan 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1082; H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Inter-war Period 1918–1940* (Westport, CT, 1997), 184–6; William C. Mills, 'Sir Joseph Ball', 308–09; Paul Stafford, 'The Chamberlain–Halifax Visit to Rome: A Reappraisal', *EHR*, 98, 386 (1983), 61–100.

<sup>65</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 12 Feb 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1085.

<sup>66</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 19 Feb 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1086; for a corresponding 'wave of optimism', see Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Buchan, 14 Mar 1939, Buchan Papers, Box 10; doubts can be found in Vansittart's minute (17 Feb) on Neville Henderson to Chamberlain, 15 Feb 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/315; untitled minute, Cadogan, 26 Feb 1939, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/294.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes, Cab 12(39), 18 Mar 1939, Cab 23/98.

would join Britain in opposing further German aggression.<sup>68</sup> This became, on 20 March, the British proposal for a four-power consultative pact limited only to Britain, France, Poland and Soviet Russia.<sup>69</sup> It was then essential to determine Soviet attitudes and capabilities. The initial Soviet response was predictable: they saw the annexation as 'the direct and inevitable result of the Anglo-French policy of "appeasement" and capitulation'.<sup>70</sup> The need for information was common to both sides. On 18 March, Litvinov pressed Seeds about Britain's response to Hitler's actions, while Maisky called on Halifax to propose a 'conference at Bucharest to discuss joint action'.<sup>71</sup>

But, regardless, the British needed to determine Soviet strength. On 22 March, Collier received the War Office's estimate, one which Halifax 'wanted urgently'. Little had changed since the Czech crisis in May 1938. Firebrace concluded that the Red Army would be a 'serious obstacle to an attacker', but would have 'much less value' on the offensive, although the Far Eastern forces were thought rather more capable. This merely confirmed Oliphant's own view. Vansittart was more practical, and spoke more to policy:

Nobody expects Russia to take the offensive against Germany anyhow . . . [but] what I do hope – &, given good management[,] expect – to see Russia do is to stiffen and reinforce Rumanian and/or Polish *resistance*. That is an entirely different task, and it is well within Russian powers if we can get her to do it. And we *should* endeavour to get her to do so. It is certainly not a very brilliant performance, but it is an absolutely indispensable one, if Poland & Rumania are to resist Germany, as they must in our interest as well as their own. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but there has never been any earthly reason why a purse should be silk. There is sometimes 'nothing like leather'.<sup>72</sup>

Vansittart's hope for a functional 'purse' was not surprising. Over the previous six years, Soviet Russia had been thought of, at best, as a counterweight, not a roadblock, to German power.

<sup>68</sup> Channon diary entry, 18 Mar 1939, in R. Rhodes James, ed., *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (London, 1967), 187; for Anglo-Soviet relations from March to May, see Robert Manne, 'The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939', *JCH*, 9, 3 (1974), 3–27.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes, Cab 13(39), 20 Mar 1939, Cab 23/98.

<sup>70</sup> Chilston to FO, tel 9, 17 Mar 1939, FO 371/22995/C3691/19/18.

<sup>71</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 35, 18 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3430/3356/18; Harvey diary entry, 19 Mar 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>72</sup> Lt-Col Brownjohn to Collier, 16 Mar 1939, FO 371/23688/N1542/485/38 enclosing Firebrace, 'The Value of the Red Army for War', 7 Mar 1939, minutes, Oliphant (16 Mar), Cadogan (16 Mar) and Vansittart (17 Mar; original emphasis); see also Kennard (minister, Warsaw) to FO, disp 65, 22 Mar 1939, FO 371/22996/C3946/19/18.

But there was also a Far Eastern dimension to Anglo-Soviet relations.<sup>73</sup> On 23 March, Craigie reported that Japan was considering its options in the light of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. Denning's view was that any Anglo-Soviet arrangement was potentially dangerous. A '*security* pact' between the two countries, if it applied equally to Europe and to the Far East, would 'turn the majority of Japanese against us'. His views coincided with similar concerns that Japan might then look with favour on the German-Italian proposal to 'transform the existing Anti-Comintern Pact into a military alliance'. In this light, it was best to attempt 'to convince Japan that this is a European crisis and that she had better keep out of it', to strengthen Britain's own forces in the region and to work with the Americans. The 'really vital point, however, is really the question of our commitments to Soviet Russia . . . It is on that [that] the Japanese Cabinet's decision will most probably depend.' Sir John Brenan saw the situation differently. As Japan was 'already engaged' in a war with China and 'cannot in present circumstances seriously fear an unprovoked attack from either Russia or the democratic nations', he doubted whether any Anglo-Russian agreement would 'be a menace to Japan unless she herself contemplated further unprovoked aggression'. R. G. Howe agreed. While no one had any definitive answers, it was clear that the European and Far Eastern situations were closely linked.

This was also evident to the War Office.<sup>74</sup> There, it was believed that the Japanese were pursuing 'a cautious diplomacy' and would walk a fine line 'until the European situation has clarified itself considerably'.<sup>75</sup> The War Office believed that Japan had the resources both to continue the war with China and to attack Soviet Russia, 'but it would be a very big undertaking for Japan, for although the various "purges" have weakened Russia's military strength, her Far Eastern armies are still strong and they would be, to a great extent, self-contained, even if Russia is fighting simultaneously on two fronts'. More 'tempting' for Japan, the War Office opined, would be 'action against Great Britain, if the latter were deeply involved in Europe'. That conclusion, however, was tentative and contingent upon Soviet Russia's actions. When making decisions about

<sup>73</sup> This paragraph is based on Craigie to FO, tel 275, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23560/F2876/456/23, original emphasis, minutes, Denning (23 Mar), Brenan and Howe (both 25 Mar); minute, Howe, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/22944/C4311/421/62, minutes, Mounsey (23 Mar) and Cadogan (24 Mar); minutes on Craigie to FO, tel 269, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23560/F2885/456/23.

<sup>74</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on 'Japan', MI2, 21 Mar 1939, WO 106/5605.

<sup>75</sup> For a Japanese probe of British attitudes to Russia, see Kirkpatrick's talk with Kase (Japanese embassy), 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3942/3356/18.

Soviet Russia, Britain would have to consider the impact in both Europe and the Far East.

How to act in the Far East was also complicated by the fact that British policy there had been contentious even before the absorption of Czechoslovakia. Ronald had suggested at the end of February that Japan's actions had become so provocative that Britain should denounce the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty and create the legal means to initiate trade sanctions against Tokyo. Howe agreed, terming the Japanese actions in the Far East 'the Axis policy of calculated blackmail'.<sup>76</sup> However, the Board of Trade intervened.<sup>77</sup> The latter department opposed such a drastic measure, and the matter stalled. Instead, the issue of the Far East became tied up with the wider issue of a possible Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*.

But that is to get ahead of events. The last two weeks of March were filled with frantic efforts to discover the attitudes of the various eastern and northern European nations both to Germany's action and to any possible Soviet involvement. There were rumours that the occupation of Czechoslovakia was a prelude to some German action against Romania and hence Hungary and Ukraine. From Poland, there was an evasive reply as to whether Warsaw would contemplate an alliance with Bucharest to resist German aggression. This answer was interpreted in Paris as foreshadowing that the Poles would 'lean on Germany' without an Anglo-French guarantee.<sup>78</sup> The Romanians allowed that they would 'welcome Soviet military assistance' against Germany, and the French said that they would support Bucharest if the British would.<sup>79</sup>

What about Soviet Russia? While the Soviets accepted the British proposal for a four-power consultation on 22 March, the ramifications of Moscow's participation were not straightforward.<sup>80</sup> One issue was the attitude of Poland and Romania. The French feared, despite the Romanian attitude noted above, that neither country would be willing to

<sup>76</sup> Untitled memo, Ronald, 28 Feb 1939, FO 371/23560/F3478/456/23, Howe's minute and enclosures.

<sup>77</sup> Willis (B of T) to Ronald, 14 April 1939, FO 371/23560/F3695/456/23.

<sup>78</sup> Kennard to FO, tel 58, 18 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3454/3356/18; Phipps to FO, tel 114, 18 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3455/3356/18; Kennard to FO, 20 Mar 1939, tel 61 decipher, FO 371/23061/C3665/3356/18.

<sup>79</sup> Gladwyn Jebb's interview with Tilea (Romanian minister to London), 18 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3576/3356/18; Campbell (Paris) to FO, tel 121, 20 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3540/3356/18; Cadogan's conversation with Corbin (French ambassador to London), 20 Mar 1939, FO 371/23060/C3598/3356/18. For Romania, see Dov B. Lungu, 'The European Crisis of March–April 1939: The Romanian Dimension', *IHR*, 7, 3 (1985), 390–414; for France, see Peter Jackson, 'France and the Guarantee to Romania, April 1939', *INS*, 10, 2 (1995), 242–72.

<sup>80</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 42, 22 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3821/3356/18.



permit Soviet troops to move on to their territory, and that the Poles, in particular, would rather remain neutral than do so. Sargent concurred, and thus counselled asking for Soviet economic assistance only. Cadogan pointed out that at present only '*consultation*' was contemplated, but agreed that the French concerns would have to be considered when (and if) later discussions involved what each Power '*might be prepared to do*'.<sup>81</sup> On 21 and 22 March, the official French views arrived. Georges Bonnet, the French minister for foreign affairs, made it clear that it was 'absolutely essential to get Poland in', as this was the only way that 'Russian help' could 'be effective'.<sup>82</sup>

The fears about Poland's policy became fact on 21 March. On that date, Jozef Beck, the Polish foreign minister, indicated that, if Poland aligned itself with Soviet Russia, this would 'undoubtedly' lead to a 'serious' German reaction. He 'implied that the participation of the Soviet Government might lead to difficulties but that Poland might be able to associate' with Britain and France 'if Soviet Russia were omitted'. This carried its own difficulties for the British, as 'having brought the Russians in we do not want to push them out again immediately'.<sup>83</sup> But the Poles were not alone in being reluctant to associate with Soviet Russia. The Finns, too, expressed 'astonishment' that London might 'consider [that the] Russians can be relied on'.<sup>84</sup> This view was shared by some at the Foreign Office; Lascelles noted (and Oliphant agreed) 'that we fully realise – I hope we do – the completely unreliable character of the Soviet govt'. From Rome, Perth reported that many countries – including Italy – would automatically reject any alignment that included Soviet Russia.<sup>85</sup> Maisky was contemptuous. He told Cadogan that 'too many people here and elsewhere were talking of now detaching Italy from the Axis'. For the Soviet ambassador, that would happen only if Mussolini felt that the 'Peace Front was stronger than Germany'. While Cadogan 'heartily concur[red]' that Italy could not be bought off, he did not favour Soviet Russia or oppose coming to terms with Italy.<sup>86</sup> 'If the position could be so simplified', Cadogan noted on 24 March, 'as to be

<sup>81</sup> Sargent's discussion with Cambon (French *chargé d'affaires* in London), 20 March 1939, FO 371/23061/C435/3356/18, minute, Cadogan (20 Mar), original emphasis.

<sup>82</sup> 'Record of an Anglo-French Conversation held in the Secretary of State's Room at the Foreign Office, on March 21, 1939 at 5 pm', 'Record of an Anglo-French Conversation held in the Prime Minister's Room at the House of Commons, on March 22, 1939, at 5 pm', both Halifax Papers, FO 800/311.

<sup>83</sup> Kennard to FO, tel 68, 21 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3727/3356/18, minute, Makins (23 Mar); Kennard to FO, tel 63, 21 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3724/3356/18.

<sup>84</sup> Snow (minister, Helsingfors) to FO, tel 22, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3849/3356/18, minutes, Lascelles (27 Mar) and Oliphant (28 Mar).

<sup>85</sup> Perth to FO, tel 213, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3907/3356/18.

<sup>86</sup> Cadogan's talk with Maisky, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/23062/C4155/3356/18.



put in the form of the question – Italy or Russia? – I w[oul]d unhesitatingly plump for the former.<sup>87</sup>

Halifax had to clarify the Polish position. On 23 March, the Polish ambassador proposed a secret agreement between Warsaw and London that the two would consult if Poland (or Romania) were threatened. This desire for such an arrangement was based on Warsaw's reluctance to offend the Germans by any linkage with Soviet Russia. Halifax's thinking about this tied together many of the strands outlined above:

H[alifax] feels adherence of Poland is essential to any effective scheme to hold up Germany in event of aggression. He also feels we should not make it too difficult for Italy to betray her Ally. He therefore thinks we cannot have Russia in the forefront of the picture although both for internal reasons and because of her ultimate military value, if only as our arsenal, we must keep her with us . . . What we want to secure is the certainty for Germany of a war on two fronts – East and West – in the event of any aggression by her.

Halifax intended to bring this about by obtaining a Polish undertaking that the country would defend itself against German aggression and then promising Warsaw Anglo-French support. Further, if Poland were willing to fight for Romania, then France and Britain would also pledge their support. Having achieved this, the foreign secretary would ask Romania for similar, reciprocal assurances. However, getting Polish agreement would be difficult. As Halifax noted on 25 March, 'it has been forcibly borne in upon us during these last two days, that Poland is most reluctant, and indeed, I think, would be definitely unwilling, to be publicly associated in any way with Russia'. 'As regards Russia' itself, Harvey noted, 'his [Halifax's] idea at present is to suggest that she and France should simplify the Franco-Soviet Pact . . . and turn it into a straight defensive alliance'.<sup>88</sup>

Chamberlain's view of this policy was expressed both privately and publicly.<sup>89</sup> Chamberlain stressed Poland's fear of Germany, and noted that, in such circumstances, he doubted that Warsaw would ever accept the four-power proposal. Should Britain then bother with Soviet Russia? 'I must confess to the most pronounced distrust of Russia', the prime minister wrote:

<sup>87</sup> Cadogan's minute (24 Mar) on Ogilvie-Forbes to FO, tel 172, 23 Mar 1939, FO 371/22996/C3865/19/18.

<sup>88</sup> Halifax's conversation with the Polish ambassador, 24 Mar 1939, FO 371/23062/C4086/3356/18; Harvey's diary entry, 24 Mar 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; Halifax to Salisbury, 25 Mar 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/315.

<sup>89</sup> This and the following two paragraphs are based on N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 26 Mar 1939, Chamberlain Papers, 26 Mar 1939, NC 18/1/1091; FP(36), minutes, 38th meeting, 27 Mar 1939, Cab 27/624.

I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives which seem to me have little connection with our ideas of liberty and to be concerned only with getting every one else by the ears. Moreover she is both hated and suspected by many of the smaller states . . . so that our close association with her might easily cost us the sympathy of those who would much more effectively help us if we can get them on our side.

At the Foreign Policy Committee on 27 March, Chamberlain struck many of the same chords, but added some grace notes, including a concern that Britain's linking with Soviet Russia would 'consolidate' the Anti-Comintern Pact. His conclusion showed that any choice regarding Soviet Russia was rife with difficulty. 'It looked, therefore', he told his colleagues, 'as if a failure to associate with Soviet Russia would give rise to suspicion and difficulty with the Left Wing in this country and in France, while on the other hand insistence to associate with Soviet Russia would destroy any chance of building up a solid and united front against German aggression.'

What to do? Chamberlain plumped for some 'alternative course' in which the 'Four Power Declaration' would be abandoned, and turned to Halifax's plan for an Anglo-French guarantee of Poland and Romania. By leaving 'Soviet Russia out of the picture', the prime minister argued, all the drawbacks to its inclusion would be eliminated. By a modification of the Franco-Soviet Pact, or by eliminating what Halifax termed 'some of the embarrassing conditions' within it, Chamberlain held out the possibility that there might be some way in which 'Russia might be indirectly and secretly brought into the scheme'. This provoked discussion. Hoare, while reminding the committee that '[n]o one could accuse him of any predilections in favour of Soviet Russia', wanted to ensure that the front opposing Germany contained 'as many countries as possible', and preferred a policy that kept Soviet Russia in, if only through the Franco-Soviet Pact.

Matters turned on the relative value of Poland and Soviet Russia. Opinions were divided. Halifax argued that it was 'imperative' not to 'risk offending' Poland, while Inskip and the foreign secretary both contended that Poland was of more value militarily than was Soviet Russia. The former also pointed out that Britain should 'be very careful not to get drawn into any commitments with Russia which might involve us in hostilities from Japan'. Halifax added that, while Britain and France lacked the resources to 'prevent Poland and Romania from being overrun', something needed to be done or 'we [would be] faced with the dilemma of doing nothing, or entering into a devastating war . . . In those circumstances if we had to choose between two great evils he favoured our going to war.' Those who favoured an arrangement with

Soviet Russia continued to argue, and Halifax continued to rebut. W. S. Morrison, the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, wondered whether negotiations with Soviet Russia could be kept secret, and worried that Moscow might 'react actively when she learnt that she was to be excluded from the pact'. Halifax replied that Soviet Russia 'might sulk'. Oliver Stanley worried that it might claim that British policy was 'directed to pushing Germany into a conflict with Russia'. Halifax 'pointed out that Germany could not in fact invade Russia except through Poland or Roumania'. Hoare, out of concrete arguments, turned instead to the delphic: 'All experience showed that Russia was undefeatable and he was apprehensive of the possible consequences that might result if at this juncture the enmity of Soviet Russia towards this country was increased.'

The matter stood there, and the policy of Halifax and Chamberlain was adopted. While the details were worked out, little was said publicly. Maisky was simply told that Britain now was 'contemplating' aiding Poland and Romania, by military force if necessary, a statement rapidly publicized in Soviet Russia.<sup>90</sup> The Cabinet and the leaders of the Labour Party were also kept generally informed.<sup>91</sup> In Cabinet, Hoare and Walter Elliot, the minister of health, both raised the issue of Soviet Russia, the home secretary to wonder why France had not done something via the Franco-Soviet Pact and Elliot to hope that the country could somehow be included, if only in a separate declaration, for the sake of the 'home front'. Halifax soothed both their concerns by assuring them that something might indeed be done in the future; the 'essential point' was Poland, while 'he would take what steps were possible to keep in with Russia'.<sup>92</sup> Thomas Jones caught the position nicely: 'Chamberlain and Halifax are determined not to exclude or isolate' Soviet Russia.<sup>93</sup>

The Foreign Office also discussed Soviet Russia. Seeds suggested that 'too great importance should not be attached' to Soviet assurances to Bucharest that help would be given to Romania.<sup>94</sup> He argued that Moscow's reaction to any action by Germany would 'depend on circumstances'. Only if it were believed that an attack on Romania was 'a precursor to an attack on the USSR' would the Soviets move, and then

<sup>90</sup> Cadogan's conversation with Maisky, 29 Mar 1939, FO 371/23062/C4692/3356/18; Seeds to FO, tel 50, 30 Mar 1939, FO 371/23062/C4398/3356/18.

<sup>91</sup> Dalton diary entry, 24 Mar 1939, in Ben Pimlott, *The Political Diary of Hugu Dalton 1918-1940, 1945-1960* (London, 1986), 257-8.

<sup>92</sup> Minutes, Cab 15(39), 29 Mar 1939, Cab 23/98.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Jones to Abraham Flexner, 2 Apr 1939, in T. Jones, *Diary with Letters*, 431.

<sup>94</sup> This and the following paragraph are based on Seeds to FO, disp 101, 21 Mar 1939, FO 371/23061/C3968/3356/18, minutes, Roberts (28 Mar), Strang (28 Mar), Collier (29 Mar), Oliphant (two, 29 Mar) and Vansittart (31 Mar).

only (barring a guarantee of British and French aid) after due consideration. And, in a phrase that Strang found particularly significant, should the attack on Romania be felt by the Soviets to be

the prelude, not to an attack on the Soviet Union, but a German move westwards against France and Great Britain, it seems certain that the Soviet Government would do everything in their power to keep out of the resulting struggle and would indeed feel considerable satisfaction at the prospect of an international conflict from which all the participants would be likely to emerge considerably weakened and which would thus furnish the Soviet Union with an opportunity of greatly strengthening its own position.

But this opinion was contentious.

Some supported it. Roberts felt that Seeds had provided a 'powerful justification for our present approach to the problem of collective security', and Strang cited the passage quoted above. Collier disagreed. He contended that the Soviet leaders, rather than watching the situation purely with an eye to their own advantage, 'must be feeling very uneasy, that they realise that it will be to their interest to join in preventing a German attack on either Roumania or Poland, but that they will not move unless they can be quite sure that we and the French will move too'. This was the issue of 'chestnuts' once again. Oliphant was succinct: 'I do not share Mr Collier's view.' Vansittart was supportive: 'I should have thought it quite clear that the Soviet Govt are feeling uneasy. *Everyone* is – and for the same reasons!' As to possible Soviet aid, Oliphant added that the head of the Secret Service had told him that Soviet Russia 'could do nothing of real value' to aid Poland or Romania.

Other discussion resulted from Hudson's visit to Moscow. He had left for the Soviet capital on 18 March, and his trade talks had inevitably been affected by the larger political crisis. On 27 March, when it was time to issue a press communiqué, the Soviets had inserted some phrases saying that foreign-policy issues had also been discussed.<sup>95</sup> Seeds had requested instructions about the contents of the communiqué, and, in Lascelles's irate phrase, 'if our telephonic reply had not been wilfully delayed by the Soviet authorities', the political contents would have been deleted. However, both Seeds and Litvinov were perplexed as to why the political subjects should not have been reported. The ambassador, in fact, went so far as to aver that the omission would make sense only if Britain 'desire[s] publicly to abandon after about a week's trial, [the] recent policy of consulting [the] Soviet Government and to relapse into an aloofness which has poisoned relations since Munich'. 'In fact', he

<sup>95</sup> This and the following paragraph are based on Seeds to FO, tel 49, 28 Mar 1939, FO 371/23681/N1683/92/38, minute, Lascelles (29 Mar).

concluded '[the] communiqué presents a picture of what I would myself wish Anglo-Soviet relations to be, namely friendliness and contacts but no obligations.'

This offended Lascelles's *amour propre* and touched his prejudices. He was insistent that the political aspects should have been kept out of the communiqué. He blamed the Soviets, for 'if we are not to stultify the scheme of international collaboration which they themselves ostensibly desire, we must go very warily' in order not to frighten the Poles and Finns. And 'despite M. Litvinov's pretence of pained surprise', the Soviet commissar knew that Hudson was authorized to discuss only trade, not political matters. Finally, in any case, the Soviet press had 'ignored' the Hudson mission, downplayed the British 'willingness to collaborate in the political sphere' and 'continued to blackguard the democratic Powers'. Seeds's contention about 'aloofness' suggested to Lascelles that 'he has not yet fully grasped the fundamental quality of Soviet hostility towards the greatest of the capital and imperialist Powers. "Contacts" – yes, we are trying them: but "friendliness" is not for a moment to be hoped for.'

Collier again disagreed. He argued that if Britain felt that it 'is to our advantage to retain at the very least the benevolent neutrality of the Soviet Government, we ought not, I submit, to blow hot and cold on this question of political *consultation* with them'. He pointed out that everyone knew about Hudson's mission and thus that 'a reference to it in the communiqué could have no appreciable effect on their attitude'. Collier therefore preferred to treat the entire incident as a misunderstanding.<sup>96</sup> Cadogan picked up on this, and told Maisky on 29 March that the British desire to omit political matters had resulted simply from the fact that they 'had not seen the text'. As 'M. Maisky, as is his wont, accepted very grudgingly my explanation', Cadogan had defused the situation.<sup>97</sup> However, the reactions in both Moscow and London had underlined their mutual suspicion and hostility. Hudson later warned Halifax that the British must 'never forget their [the Soviets'] intense native suspicion', an interpretation in which Halifax concurred.<sup>98</sup>

Events prevented the British from carrying out the plans that had been agreed to at the Foreign Policy Committee and Cabinet. Fear of what Halifax termed a German '*coup de main*' led to Chamberlain and Halifax's getting the Cabinet's approval on 30 March to issue an unilateral

<sup>96</sup> His minute (29 Mar) on the document in n. 95.

<sup>97</sup> Cadogan's memo of his conversation with Maisky, 29 Mar 1939, FO 371/23681/N1721/92/38.

<sup>98</sup> Hudson to Halifax, 29 Mar 1939, and reply, 4 April 1939, both Halifax Papers, FO 800/322.

guarantee of Poland's territorial integrity.<sup>99</sup> Soviet Russia was not a consideration in the Cabinet's discussion on the 30th. However, at the Cabinet the following morning, and before his statement in the Commons, Chamberlain noted that several Labour leaders (whom he had seen the night before) had expressed 'strong objections to any action being taken which would imply that Russia was being left on one side'.<sup>100</sup> Chamberlain had promised to speak to Maisky before making his declaration in the House. Chamberlain also outlined Labour's attitude to the FPC. There, he explained that he had told the Labour leaders that 'the absence of any reference to Russia in the declaration was based on expediency and not on any ideological consideration'.<sup>101</sup> This was true but misleading. Omitting Soviet Russia was 'expedient' inasmuch as it avoided any complications with Poland and Romania; however, Chamberlain's attitude towards Moscow was entirely negative.

Whether this derived from ideology is difficult to know; what can be said for certain is that Chamberlain's entire concept of foreign policy was based on retaining the power to take final decisions in his own hands. Chamberlain had not abandoned his fond hope of detaching Italy from Germany, and had sent to Mussolini the terms of his declaration in advance of its announcement in Parliament. A unilateral guarantee to Poland (later extended to Romania and agreed to by the French) maintained this control, whereas any attempt to link Soviet Russia to the guarantee might conceivably give Moscow a say in committing Britain to action. It was for this very reason that the British generally had disliked the Franco-Soviet Pact; they did not want it to reoccur in any Anglo-Soviet agreement.

The Soviet response was predictably irate. In early April, Litvinov was 'outraged' at being ignored.<sup>102</sup> Litvinov spoke of the likelihood of Soviet

<sup>99</sup> Minutes, Cab 16(39), 30 Mar 1939, Cab 23/98. The best account of the decision to give the guarantee and its consequences is G. Bruce Strang, 'Once More into the Breach: Britain's Guarantee to Poland, March 1939', *JCH*, 31, 4 (1996), 721–52. It is important to note that the British intended the guarantee as more of a declaration of principle than of intent. By making it clear that an attack on Poland would be a *casus belli*, the British hoped to deter Hitler and, if this did not work, to create a second, eastern front in line with British military planning; see A. J. Prazmowska, 'War over Danzig? The Dilemma of Anglo-Polish Relations in the Months Preceding the Outbreak of the Second World War', *HJ*, 26, 1 (1983), 177–83; Prazmowska, 'The Eastern Front and the British Guarantee to Poland of March 1939', *EHQ*, 14 (1984), 183–209.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes, Cab 17(39), 31 Mar 1939, Cab 23/98. On this point, see the remarks by Alexander Hardinge (George VI's private secretary): 'The Labour Party will be quite satisfied with the policy as long as Russia is included' (in notes, 30 Mar 1939, accompanying his letter to Buchan of 4 Apr 1939, both Buchan Papers, Box 10).

<sup>101</sup> FP(36), minutes of 40th meeting, 31 Mar 1936, Cab 27/624.

<sup>102</sup> Harvey diary entry, 3 Apr 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

isolation, and Maisky advanced that inviting the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs to London would be one way of showing Moscow that it was not being slighted.<sup>103</sup> But such a suggestion was complicated by the fact that Beck had come to London, and had reiterated that Poland would not accept any alignment with Soviet Russia.<sup>104</sup> Sargent also was convinced that, if Litvinov were to visit, it 'would of course arouse the deepest suspicions in every country where the Soviet connection is feared'. Besides, Sargent was not overly impressed by what he considered the likely outcomes of such a visit: 'either a secret Soviet British political agreement; or some inconclusive formula which I am afraid would merely arouse suspicions and misunderstandings everywhere – including Moscow?' In his view, 'Maisky's fictitious grievances and Litvinov's assumed sulks' should not be allowed to 'push us into action against our better judgment.' 'Personally', he went on,

I should have thought the best way of calling the Soviet bluff [is] by asking them point blank to make us a definite and detailed scheme showing the extent to which & the manner in which they are prepared to cooperate with other governments & how they propose to overcome the aversion of certain governments to cooperate with them.

Cadogan agreed: 'I regard association with the Soviet as more of a liability than an asset.' But, like Sargent, he wished to know 'what they propose – [while] indicating that we don't want a lecture on "more ideas", but some practical indication of what they propose should be *done*'. The final word went to Halifax, who 'must admit to sharing all Sir O. Sargent's doubts about the Soviet'. But the foreign secretary concluded on a practical note: 'we want if we can – Litvinov making a disproportionate amount of mischief elsewhere – to keep them with us'.

The issues of how to accomplish this and what the Soviets could do were constantly confronting decision makers in London. Maisky, 'as usual . . . suspicious and inquisitorial', hounded Halifax on 11 April to push Poland and Romania to adopt 'a reasonable attitude towards the acceptance of help from Russia'. Halifax replied that this might be counterproductive, but Maisky contended that 'some general undertaking',

<sup>103</sup> Minute of a conversation between W. N. Ewer (diplomatic correspondent, *Daily Herald*) and Maisky, 4 Apr 1939, FO 371/23063/C5430/3356/18, and the minutes by Sargent (6 Apr), Cadogan (7 Apr) and Halifax (7 Apr). The remainder of this paragraph, except where otherwise indicated, is based on the minutes.

<sup>104</sup> Eden to Halifax, personal and most confidential, 5 Apr 1939, and containing a memo of Eden's talk with Beck on 4 April, Halifax Papers, FO 800/321; Halifax to Phipps, 6 Apr 1939, FO 800/321; Harvey diary entry, 4 Apr 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 9 Apr 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1093.

not 'bilateral pacts', was the solution.<sup>105</sup> Seeds pointed out that it was difficult to get any commitment from the Soviets because Britain's guarantees already meant that 'Germany will in case of war fight on two fronts', meaning that Soviet Russia will be 'tempted to stand aloof'. The ambassador also warned of possible German territorial offers to Soviet Russia, although he noted that he did not 'think that the danger [of this] is more than "possible" as in this too I am not amongst those who seem incurably suspicious' of Moscow. Seeds was informed that the British interest was in keeping Soviet Russia in play and avoiding the 'natural tendency of the Soviet Government to stand aloof'.<sup>106</sup>

In an attempt to bind the Soviets to his side and to commit Moscow to concrete action, albeit informally, Halifax suggested on 14 April that Soviet Russia offer a guarantee to Poland and Romania parallel to that already made by Britain. Litvinov's initial response was to query Seeds as to 'how far Great Britain and other countries were prepared to go when it came to the point and what was expected from the Soviet Union'.<sup>107</sup> But, by 17 April, the Soviets had responded with a call for, instead, a 'comprehensive European plan of mutual assistance and Staff Conversations between Great Britain, France and Soviet Russia, and assurances to Russia's Western neighbours'.<sup>108</sup> This was discussed at the FPC on 19 April.<sup>109</sup> The determining factor was the Foreign Office's evaluation of the Soviet offer.

The latter was judged 'extremely inconvenient'. The crux was that the Soviet proposal meant that Britain had 'to balance the advantage of a paper commitment by Russia to join in a war on our side against the disadvantage of associating ourselves openly with Russia'. Cadogan's presentation made the Foreign Office view clear.<sup>110</sup> Soviet Russia's military capabilities were judged to be limited to the defensive; joining

<sup>105</sup> FP(36), minutes of 42nd meeting, 11 Apr 1939, Cab 27/624, and Halifax's minute of a conversation with Maisky, 11 Apr 1939, FO 371/23063/C5068/3356/18.

<sup>106</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 61 decipher, 13 Apr 1939, and reply, tel 71, 14 Apr 1939, both FO 371/23063/C5144/3356/18.

<sup>107</sup> Minutes, Cab 20(39), 13 Apr 1939, Cab 23/98; Halifax's interview with Maisky, 14 Apr 1939, FO 371/23063/C5281/3356/18; Harvey diary entry, 14 Apr 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; FO to Seeds, tel 71, 14 Apr 1939, FO 371/23063/C5144/3356/18; Seeds to FO, tel 66 decipher, 16 Apr 1939, FO 371/23063/C5382/3356/18.

<sup>108</sup> Minutes, Cab 21(39), 19 Apr 1939, Cab 23/98; Dalton diary entry, 17 Apr 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 259.

<sup>109</sup> FP(36), minutes 43rd meeting, 19 Apr 1939, Cab 27/624; also included is 'Foreign Office comments on the proposal contained in Moscow telegram No. 69', ns, nd. The following paragraph is also based on this source.

<sup>110</sup> For Cadogan, in addition to *ibid.*, see Cadogan diary entry, 19 Apr 1939, David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945* (London, 1971), 175. He was not alone in this view: see Channon diary entry, 23 Apr 1939, in Rhodes James, *Chips*, 194.



with it would both annoy the Poles and Romanians and allow Germany to trumpet the Red menace. Thus, 'from the practical point of view, there was every argument against accepting the Russian proposal'. However, to refuse it meant 'great difficulty':

We have taken the attitude that the Soviet preach us sermons on 'collective security' but make no practical proposals. They have now made such, and they will rail at us for turning them down. And the Left in this country may be counted on to make the most of this.

With Oliver Stanley and Hoare still favouring finding a way to co-operate with the Soviets, the committee deferred the decision until the COS had provided an up-to-date assessment of Soviet military capabilities. In the meantime, the French were adjured not to respond to the Soviet overtures.

All was considered on 25 April. At the FPC, the COS's usual evaluation of Soviet power – useful on the defensive, of lesser value on the offensive and of limited aid to Poland (but capable of exerting 'a restraining influence on Japan') – was aired.<sup>111</sup> With the French opposed to the Soviet plan as it stood and the Romanians sharing the Poles' fears that any agreement with Soviet Russia might yield a German attack, the Soviet offer was declined.<sup>112</sup> This had a mixed reception at the Foreign Office.<sup>113</sup> Collier objected to the FPC's rejection of a French alternative proposal that he felt, with slight modification would have solved matters.

The head of the Northern Department also did not agree that Soviet Russia was of little value for the defence of Poland. However, his most telling criticism was political: 'I cannot help feeling that the real motive for the Cabinet's attitude is the desire to secure Russian help and at the same time to leave our hands free to enable Germany to expand eastwards at Russian expense if we think it convenient.' Collier added that the 'Russians are not so naive as not to suspect this, and I hope that we ourselves will not be so naive as to think that we can have things both ways'. Collier concluded this thunderbolt with an appeal to Strang:

<sup>111</sup> FP(36), minutes 44th meeting, 25 Apr 1939, Cab 27/624; 'Military Value of Russia. Report', COS 887 (also FP(36) 82), 24 Apr, Cab 53/48.

<sup>112</sup> Grigory Gafencu, the Romanian foreign minister, had made this point during his trip to Britain and upon arrival; see Clive (minister, Brussels) to FO, tel 42, 21 Apr 1939, FO 371/23064/C5749/3356/18, and Harvey diary entry, 25 Apr 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>113</sup> See the minutes, Collier (28 Apr 1939), Strang's undated marginalia on Collier's minute and Cadogan's minute (1 May 1939) on a copy of FP(36), 44th meeting, FO 371/23064/C6206/3356/18. The following paragraph, except where indicated, is also based on this source.

I am convinced, as I believe you are too, that Russian support, even if of no great military value, is well worth having . . . and if it is worth having at all we ought not to boggle at paying the obvious price – an assurance to the Russians, in return for their promise of help, that we will not leave them alone to face German expansion. Any other policy is to my mind not only cynical (which perhaps does not matter in dealing with people like the Russians) but foredoomed to failure.

Most of this could not have been said better by Maisky himself (and many later historians), but both Strang and Cadogan found weak points. Strang made the obvious ripostes: Germany was not being left alone to expand eastwards and Soviet Russia was not being left alone to face such a threat due to the simple fact that 'we have guaranteed Poland & Roumania'. Cadogan noted that the Romanian foreign minister, Grigory Gafencu, who had come to London, would not align himself with Soviet Russia and would view Collier's amendment to the French formula as 'tying him up [to Soviet Russia], in present circumstances – on the Euclidean principle that countries which are allied with the same country are allied with one another'.<sup>114</sup>

Collier's blast had singled out Chamberlain's remark that 'the effect of the French proposals in *Berlin* would be very bad indeed' as evidence that the prime minister was planning on pushing Germany east.<sup>115</sup> But, in fact, the prime minister's view of Soviet policy was a mirror-image of Collier's (and the Soviets') fears about British motives. As Chamberlain wrote to one of his sisters on 29 April about his negotiations:

Our chief trouble is with Russia. I confess to being deeply suspicious of her. I cannot believe that she has the same aims and objects as we have or any sympathy with democracy as such. She is afraid of Germany & Japan and would be delighted to see other people fight them. But she is probably very conscious of her own military weakness and does not want to get into a conflict if she can help it. Her efforts are therefore devoted to egging on others but herself promising only vague assistance. Unfortunately she is thoroughly mistrusted by every one else except our fatuous opposition and indeed it has been pretty clear to us that open association with her would be fatal to any hope of combining Balkan powers to resist German aggression.

In these circumstances, Chamberlain's policy was 'to keep Russia in the back ground without antagonising her'.<sup>116</sup>

This was not easy. The same day that Chamberlain wrote to his sister, Halifax had an interview with Maisky, the latter freshly back from Moscow and talks with Stalin. The foreign secretary argued that the

<sup>114</sup> For further evidence of Gafencu's attitude, see Dalton diary entry, 23 Apr 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 260–1.

<sup>115</sup> See archival sources in n. 113.

<sup>116</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 29 Apr 1939, Chamberlain Papers NC 18/1/1096.

Soviet fear that they would be committed to helping Poland and Romania while Britain and France remained aloof was 'a mistaken conclusion'.<sup>117</sup> While Maisky seemed somewhat mollified, a few days later he was reported as being 'in a rather truculent mood' and quite unwilling to support anything but a British acceptance to the Soviet offer of 17 April. Maisky refused to admit that Soviet Russia would necessarily 'come in' to a conflict in which Poland or Romania were attacked, and instead hinted darkly about 'how strong the isolationist tendency [in Moscow] had been after Munich' and the 'considerable conflict of views in the Soviet Government'.<sup>118</sup> In conversation with others, the Soviet ambassador blamed the prime minister for the British unwillingness to accept the Soviet offer.<sup>119</sup> In such circumstances, Halifax contemplated going to Geneva for direct discussions there with Litvinov. That was not to be.

The latter's dismissal on 3 May came as a 'complete surprise' to the Foreign Office.<sup>120</sup> It began a swirl of speculation in London, including the half-facetious remark: 'Will he be shot?' For Collier the 'obvious assumption is that M. Stalin is disgruntled at what he regards as the failure of those [British and French] Governments to respond adequately to the Soviet overtures, regards or affects to regard the whole of M. Litvinov's policy as a failure and desires to demonstrate to the world (including the Germans, who are already putting this interpretation upon his action) that he is returning to the policy of isolation'. That Soviet policy was headed in this direction was also believed by Oliphant, while Vansittart thought that isolation would 'only be a prelude to something worse'. Some thought that 'worse' might be a Soviet-German *rapprochement*.<sup>121</sup>

Speculation was fuelled by further reports that the Germans were leaning on the Japanese to convert the Anti-Comintern Pact into a

<sup>117</sup> Halifax's memo of an interview with Maisky, 29 Apr 1939, FO 371/23065/C6338/3356/18.

<sup>118</sup> The minute by Ewer (correspondent, *Daily Herald*) of a conversation with Maisky, private and confidential (nd, but c. 1–2 May 1939), FO 371/23065/C6743/3356/18, and the minutes by Strang (2 May), Cadogan (3 May) and Halifax (3 May).

<sup>119</sup> Dalton diary entry, 7 May 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 264.

<sup>120</sup> 'Note of an Interview with Sir Alexander Cadogan', R. Cecil, 4 May 1939, Cecil Papers, Add MSS 51089. Halifax's remarks are at FP(36), minutes 45th meeting, 5 May 1939, Cab 27/624. For discussions of why Litvinov was dismissed, See David Dunn, 'Maksim Litvinov: Commissar of Contradiction', *JCH*, 23 (1988), 240–1; Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Fall of Litvinov: A Revisionist View', *JCH*, 27 (1992), 639–47; and Albert Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact', *E-AS*, 52, 1 (2000), 33–56.

<sup>121</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 81 immediate, 4 May 1939, FO 371/23685/N2253/233/38, and the minute by Collier (4 May); Seeds to FO, tel 83, 4 May 1939, FO 371/23685/N2282/233/38, and the minutes by Collier (5 May), Oliphant (6 May) and Vansittart (9 May); Channon diary entry, 3 May 1939, in Rhodes James, *Chips*, 197.

military alliance, aimed at Britain and France, by raising a fear in Japanese minds that otherwise there might be a possibility of a Soviet–German alliance.<sup>122</sup> Despite such problems, the Far East was not going to determine Anglo-Soviet relations. As Howe noted in the Far Eastern Department, ‘H[is] M[ajesty’s] G[overnment] may at any time find it necessary to come to some military understanding with Russia, in spite of the adverse effect which such a decision will have on our relations with Japan and on the situation in the Far East.’ If it were necessary to do so, then the British would have to rely on American influence ‘in preventing Japan from committing herself too far in the direction of a military alliance with the Axis’.<sup>123</sup> While the British were willing to reassure the Japanese that any Anglo-Soviet agreement would be limited to Europe, they were not willing to be coerced into ending negotiations with Soviet Russia by Tokyo’s threatening closer relations with the Axis Powers as a consequence.<sup>124</sup> Thus, in Tokyo Craigie countered this tendency by pouring into Japanese ears ‘triple distilled poison’, suggesting the possibility of a Soviet–German *rapprochement* to Japan’s detriment if Britain were to reject the Soviet overtures for an alliance.<sup>125</sup> But, of course, the fate of the alliance had not yet been decided.

The Soviet offer of 17 April was discussed at the Cabinet on 3 May. ‘[A] tri-partite pact on the lines proposed’, in Halifax’s view, ‘would make war inevitable. On the other hand, he thought that it was only fair to assume that if we rejected Russia’s proposal, Russia would sulk. There was also always the bare possibility that a refusal of Russia’s offer might even throw her into Germany’s arms.’ For the Admiralty, Stanhope pointed out that a Soviet alliance would ‘create great difficulties’ with Spain, whose position athwart British lines of communication was of crucial importance. Chatfield concurred, although he noted that a Soviet–German agreement would at least ‘decrease the risk that Japan would make a military pact with Germany’.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Denning’s minute (5 May) on Craigie to FO, tel 380, 3 May 1939, FO 371/23561/F4225/456/23.

<sup>123</sup> Howe’s minute (10 May) on Craigie to FO, tel 381, FO 371/23561/F4212/456/23.

<sup>124</sup> Halifax did his best to assure the Japanese that any Anglo-Soviet co-operation would be limited to Europe; see his minute of a conversation with the Japanese ambassador, 27 Apr 1939, FO 371/23561/F4055/456/23. On the rumoured pact between Tokyo and Berlin, see the minutes on Maj. C. R. Major (WO) to Ronald, secret and personal, 29 Apr 1939, FO 371/23561/F4133/456/23; the minutes on Craigie to FO, tel 421 decipher, 13 May 1939, and reply, tel 237, 22 May 1939, both FO 371/23561/F4527/456/23.

<sup>125</sup> Howe’s minute (17 May) on Craigie to FO, tel 428 decipher, 15 May 1939, FO 371/23561/F4604/456/23.

<sup>126</sup> Minutes, Cab 26(39), 3 May 1939, Cab 23/99.

With opinions divided in the Cabinet, discussion of the Soviet proposal was taken up at the FPC on 5 May.<sup>127</sup> But that morning, before the meeting, Chamberlain had defended himself against public pressure to make an alliance with Soviet Russia. He was 'most scathing' in the House of Commons, 'and clearly revealed his dislike of both the "Bollos" [Bolsheviks] and of Russia' and their Parliamentary supporters.<sup>128</sup> At the FPC meeting that afternoon, tempers were calmer. The dismissal of Litvinov and what it portended for Soviet policy coloured the entire meeting. The Soviet proposal of 17 April was quickly dismissed because it was felt to offend the states of eastern Europe (including Turkey, a key to British defence plans in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean). The meeting then discussed the Soviet demand for a 'no separate peace' clause. This divided the committee. Stanley, Hoare, Chatfield and Malcolm Macdonald (the colonial secretary) were in favour; Chamberlain, Halifax, Morrison and Inskip were opposed. The former group felt that the clause added nothing to Britain's commitments and, if it were the Soviet price for an agreement, it should be paid. The latter group felt that to do so would tie Britain's hands in all future circumstances. Further, as Chamberlain put it, 'a tripartite "no separate peace" agreement . . . might find . . . [Britain] faced with an entirely new situation', particularly in the light of Litvinov's dismissal. With Halifax noting that there was no 'reliable information' as to why Litvinov had gone, speculation was rampant. Chatfield's vision was the most ominous: Litvinov's 'successor . . . [might] favour some isolationist or even pro-German policy', a possibility supported by Maisky's enigmatic statements.

The result was two telegrams to Seeds, outlining the British position. Seeds was asked whether the Soviet proposal of 17 April still stood in light of Litvinov's dismissal (in which case Britain would be 'very willing' to discuss the issue of a separate peace) and to request that Soviet Russia make a unilateral public declaration about eastern Europe in line with the Anglo-French utterances. The latter request was accompanied by Halifax's explanation that 'this formula does, in fact, give the Soviet Government a reciprocal assurance of common action, since the declaration . . . only places them under a conditional obligation in a case where *ex hypothesi* Great Britain and France are already engaged'.<sup>129</sup> An openly

<sup>127</sup> This paragraph except where indicated, is based on FP(36), minutes of 45th meeting, 5 May 1939, Cab 27/624.

<sup>128</sup> Channon diary entry, 5 May 1939, in Rhodes James, *Chips*, 197.

<sup>129</sup> FO to Seeds, tels 98 and 99, 6 May 1939, appendices II and III, Cab 27/624.

tripartite agreement remained unacceptable for the same reasons: the complications it would cause in all dealings with east European states.<sup>130</sup>

There was an immediate scurry to determine the Soviet position. On 6 May, Maisky, who announced himself puzzled by Litvinov's dismissal, evaded a direct reply to Halifax's question as to whether that event 'should be held to signify any change in policy'. Maisky's rejoinder, 'that no change of policy was to be assumed', was less than a guarantee,<sup>131</sup> and Oliver Harvey, Halifax's secretary, noted the 'great obscurity about Russia' that surrounded the negotiations.<sup>132</sup> The answers lay in Moscow. On 9 May, Seeds saw Viacheslav Molotov, Litvinov's successor. Molotov immediately told the British ambassador that the Soviet proposal was still on the table, but then, in the words of Seeds, 'subject [ed] me to relentless cross-examination' on the British draft. Molotov laid stress on the need for military talks, contested that the Poles objected to direct association with the Soviets, enquired as to whether the British had guaranteed the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, and demanded, during a 'most unpleasant ten minutes', why the British and French replies were not identical and whether each had approved the other's draft. Seeds replied as best he could, but several of these points were beyond his brief. In spite of a thinly veiled threat by Molotov that Soviet policy 'was liable to alter if the other States changed theirs', the discussion ended amiably.<sup>133</sup>

In London, Halifax endeavoured the same day to make the British position clear to Maisky. The key to the discussion was the Soviet concern that 'there was some possibility of the Soviet Government being involved either in advance of France and ourselves or alone'. Halifax did his best to disabuse Maisky of this anxiety, pointing out that the British draft committed the Soviets only when Britain and France were involved in hostilities. Maisky professed himself unconvinced, arguing that 'there were many ways in which the strategical position might develop'. Halifax rebutted that, as long as the 'two conditions' that Britain had put on its

<sup>130</sup> This is nicely summarized in 'Negotiations between His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Government, March-May 1939', ns, 7 May 1939, FO 371/23065/C7010/3356/18.

<sup>131</sup> Nicolson diary entry, 4 May 1939, in Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 401; Halifax's memo of a conversation with Maisky, 6 May 1939, FO 371/23065/C6705/3356/18.

<sup>132</sup> Harvey diary entry, 7 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>133</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 87, 9 May 1939, FO 371/23065/C6804/3356/18. For Molotov's career, see Steven Merritt Miner, 'His Master's Voice: Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov as Stalin's Foreign Commissar', in Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim, eds., *The Diplomats 1939-1979* (Princeton, 1994), 65-100; for his early policies, see Derek Watson, 'Molotov's Apprenticeship in Foreign Policy: The Triple Alliance Negotiations in 1939', *E-AS*, 52, 4 (2000), 695-722.

guarantee to Poland and Romania were observed, he would be willing to endeavour to meet any Soviet concerns. The matter rested there, but, in a passage that Halifax stroked out, Maisky asked the following question: was the 'threat' to Poland or Romania that Halifax had discussed 'direct or indirect?'<sup>134</sup> This was significant, for over the course of the next three months, much would turn on the answer. But, at this time, Halifax only reported his meeting with Maisky to the Cabinet, where both Hoare and Stanley pushed the foreign secretary to endeavour to get the Soviets onside.<sup>135</sup>

While negotiations continued, another attempt was made to determine the value of Soviet Russia as an ally. The COS met on 9 May to consider this very issue. There was no change in their evaluation. In considering whether gaining Soviet Russia as an ally was worth making Spain an enemy (as was thought likely due to the latter's fervid anti-communism), the chiefs were equivocal. If Soviet Russia were 'at least neutral', then 'the advantages of an alliance with Russia would not offset the disadvantages of the open hostility of Spain'. However, 'the active and whole-hearted assistance of Russia as our ally would be of great value', and 'the greatest danger to which the British Empire could be exposed would be a combination of Russia and Axis Powers'.<sup>136</sup> This latter concern led to a reconsideration on 16 May, but in the interim there were political developments.

On 11 May, Maisky again told Halifax that Soviet Russia demanded 'complete reciprocity' in any agreement. By this, he meant that Moscow wished to be covered should its commitments to the Baltic states involve it in war. Halifax pointed out that Soviet commitments were not Britain's concern, but that a failure to grant what Maisky wished in no way affected the idea of 'reciprocity' towards Poland and Romania, the matter under discussion. Maisky then turned towards a consideration of the 'military discussions'. Without Anglo-Soviet-French talks, the Anglo-French military commitment to aid Poland and Romania could be delayed, and 'the Soviet Government would not know when such intervention would take place'.<sup>137</sup> Soviet suspicion was evident. Halifax's reply was brisk: 'our guarantee to Poland and Roumania involved us in coming immediately to their assistance, if our conditions were

<sup>134</sup> Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 9 May 1939, FO 371/23065/C6812/3356/18.

<sup>135</sup> Minutes, Cab 27(39), 10 May 1939, Cab 23/99.

<sup>136</sup> COS, minutes 293rd meeting, 9 May 1939, Cab 53/11; 'Balance of Strategical Value in War as Between Spain as an Enemy and Russia as an Ally', COS 902 (in draft), COS, 10 May 1939, Cab 53/49, and a paper with the same title, COS 904 (JP), JPC, 8 May 1939, Cab 53/49.

<sup>137</sup> Halifax's interview with Maisky, 11 May 1939, FO 371/23065/C6922/3356/18.

fulfilled, and that, if words meant anything, it was impossible for us to give any assurance more complete'.<sup>138</sup> Despite this assurance, the official Soviet reply on 14 May rejected the British draft.<sup>139</sup> Moscow's concerns had been adumbrated by Maisky; what was required was 'reciprocity', an extension of the guarantees to the Baltic states and a 'concrete agreement' as to the 'forms and extent of assistance' to be offered.

Mutual suspicion abounded. Chamberlain was annoyed that the Soviet rejection had been published, and his adjectives reflected both his prejudices and his dislike of anyone who failed to see the rectitude of his own position: 'It is an odd way of carrying on negotiations, to reply to our reasoned & courteous despatch by publishing a tendentious & one sided retort in their press. But they have no understanding of this countries [sic] mentality or conditions and no manners.' As was frequently the case with Chamberlain, he saw a link between all of those who disagreed with him:

they [the Soviets] are working hand in hand with our opposition. The latter don't want to see anything that doesn't exalt & glorify Russia or perhaps they might understand that if alliance with Russia which is incapable of giving much effective aid were to alienate Spain & drive her into the Axis camp we should lose far more in the West than we could ever hope to gain in the East.<sup>140</sup>

However, the Soviet rejection meant that the matter needed to be considered more carefully.

The 16th of May was full of such reconsideration. On that day, the COS met to re-examine the value of Soviet Russia.<sup>141</sup> Fearing the possibility of some sort of Russo-German understanding, the COS decided that an agreement with Soviet Russia would not further increase Spain's animosity towards Britain. Equally, the defence of eastern Europe required active Soviet co-operation, a decision sent to the Foreign Policy Committee for consideration that evening.<sup>142</sup> Between these two meetings, Halifax convened an informal discussion at the Foreign Office. Discussion there went to the crux of the matter: 'It is a question

<sup>138</sup> British aid for Poland had been decided: 'Anglo-French Action in Support of Poland', COS 905, COS, 3 Jun 1939, Cab 53/49.

<sup>139</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 93, 14 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7065/3356/18.

<sup>140</sup> N. Chamberlain to his sister, Hilda, 14 May 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1099.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes 295th and 296th meetings COS, both 16 May, Cab 53/11; Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922-1939', *CJH*, 28, 2(1993) 217-18.

<sup>142</sup> Yielding 'Negotiations with Soviet Russia. Aide Mémoire by the Chiefs of Staff', as appendix II in FP(36), minutes, 47th meeting, 16 May 1939, Cab 27/625.



of mutual trust. It is difficult for a British Conservative Government to negotiate an agreement with a Russian Communist one.<sup>143</sup> At the FPC, Chatfield made the case for the Soviet alliance that the COS had recommended.<sup>144</sup> Chamberlain and Halifax continued to avoid any commitment that would embarrass or annoy Poland and Romania, although Cadogan now believed that it was best to 'go the whole hog' with Soviet Russia if only to head off a deal between Moscow and Berlin.<sup>145</sup> There was also concern that the Soviet proposal would both commit Britain to defend purely Soviet interests and place the decision as to war or peace in Soviet hands. Chatfield, Stanley and Hoare favoured making such a commitment, but Halifax and Chamberlain did not. The result was a call for further discussions. As Henry Channon, Butler's parliamentary private secretary, shrewdly noted: 'I gather that it has now been decided not to embrace the Russian bear, but to hold out a hand and accept its paw gingerly. No more. The worst of both worlds.'<sup>146</sup>

Further discussions took place informally and semi-officially, through conversations between Vansittart and Maisky.<sup>147</sup> On 16 and 17 May, the diplomatic adviser was able to pare down – by the likely elimination of the Baltic guarantees – the Soviet demands to an irreducible minimum: immediate military discussions.<sup>148</sup> A rapid decision was needed.<sup>149</sup> On 17 May, the Cabinet was informed of all the discussions, but took no decision. 'To hug the bear', Channon noted in his diary that same day, 'or not?'<sup>150</sup> The essential arguments were made at the FPC two days later. There, Halifax relayed the news that Maisky had only that morning gone back on his tentative concessions to Vansittart and now took the position that 'the only basis on which the Soviet Government were prepared to proceed was that of a Triple Pact between Great Britain, France and Russia'.

Halifax was in a dilemma. While recognizing 'how serious would be the consequence of a breakdown of the present negotiations' with Moscow,

<sup>143</sup> Harvey diary entry, 16 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>144</sup> FP(36), minutes, 47th meeting, 16 May 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>145</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 16 May 1939, in Dilks, ed., *Cadogan Diaries*, 180.

<sup>146</sup> Channon diary entry, 16 May 1939, in Rhodes James, *Chips*, 199.

<sup>147</sup> This and the following two paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on Vansittart's account of a lunch with Maisky, 16 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7268/3356/18; Halifax to Chamberlain, 18 May 1939, Prem 1/409; minutes, Cab 28(39), 17 May 1939, Cab 23/99; FP(36), minutes, 48th meeting, 19 May 1939, Cab 27/625; Cadogan's diary entries, 17–19 May 1939, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 180–1.

<sup>148</sup> Minute, Peake (News Department, FO), 17 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7556/3356/18.

<sup>149</sup> Peake's minute of a conversation with Ewer (*Daily Mail*), 18 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7468/3356/18.

<sup>150</sup> Channon diary entry, 17 May 1939, in Rhodes James, *Chips*, 199.

the foreign secretary also realized 'that the question of encirclement was at the moment very much in the public mind'. What to do? On the one hand, he pointed out that the Germans would declare Britain to be 'the inventor and creator of the encirclement policy' no matter what the government's decision as to the Soviet proposal. On the other hand, 'he had the strongest possible distaste for a policy which meant our acquiescing in Soviet blackmail and bluff'.<sup>151</sup> Discussion then turned on whether the public or Germany would see any difference between the Soviet proposal and the more nuanced version that Vansittart had discussed.

Again, opinion was divided. Hoare, Inskip and (to a lesser extent) Simon believed that neither would see a difference and that the government would be blamed if the talks broke down. But Chamberlain was adamant: the two proposals had a 'fundamental difference', in that the Soviet plan would align the 'Great Powers . . . in peace just as they would be if war broke out', and that this might push Hitler to begin a war. With no agreement in sight, a decision was delayed until a special Cabinet could be held on the 24th, by which time Halifax would have returned from a trip to Geneva scheduled for 21 May. Salisbury put the whole issue as it faced the British nicely. The decision on 'whether we should make a close alliance with Russia is', he wrote on 19 May, 'one of the most difficult we could possibly have to make'. Salisbury pointed out the ambivalent value of a Soviet alliance: on the one hand, its strength (however circumscribed) would be useful; on the other, its ideological inclinations would alienate potential friends and allies. He concluded that only the possibility of a Soviet-German alliance – 'the greatest thing we have to fear' – would make an Anglo-Soviet alliance a necessity.<sup>152</sup>

At Geneva, Halifax continued his negotiations.<sup>153</sup> He spoke with Daladier, who favoured the Soviet proposal. The French prime minister argued that any attack on Soviet Russia that did not invoke the Anglo-French guarantees of Romania and Poland was 'most unlikely'. Further, he contended that Britain's obligations would not be extended under the tripartite pact. Halifax argued (borrowing Maisky's hat) to the contrary: that, if Germany 'with Polish or Roumanian connivance' attacked Soviet Russia, the Anglo-French guarantee would not come into force, whereas, under the Triple Alliance, Britain would be committed. Daladier replied simply. In such a case, Paris would be committed under the

<sup>151</sup> Issues outlined also in Cadogan to Henderson, 22 May 1939, Cadogan Papers, FO 800/294.

<sup>152</sup> Salisbury to Halifax, 19 May 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/322.

<sup>153</sup> This and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on Halifax (Geneva) to FO, tels 8 LN and 10, both 21 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7551 and C7522/3356/18.

Franco-Soviet Pact. And, if France were at war, could Britain stay out? Given Halifax's long-standing dislike of the Franco-Soviet Pact, this could scarcely have been a palatable argument, but it was unanswerable.

Maisky, who had also travelled to Geneva, reiterated all his points to Halifax on 21 May. At bottom was the Soviet suspicion that, without a full-blown tripartite pact, there were loopholes that would leave Soviet Russia in danger of facing Germany alone. By 23 May, the Poles and Romanians had dropped their objections to a tripartite pact, and, in Harvey's words, there was 'little doubt now that Soviet Russia will take nothing less'.<sup>154</sup> With Halifax moving towards a pact, all depended on Chamberlain. His attitude was also slowly changing. On 21 May, he evinced the first display of doubt, both about his position and his political support:

I have had a very tiresome week over the Russians . . . I wish I knew what sort of people we are dealing with. They may be just simple straightforward people but I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that they are chiefly concerned to see the 'capitalist' Powers tear each other to pieces while they stay out themselves . . . Those who advocate the former [an alliance] say that if we don't agree Russia & Germany will come to an understanding, which to my mind, is a pretty sinister commentary on Russian reliability. But some members of the Cabinet who were most unwilling to agree to the Alliance now appear to have swung toward the opposite view. In the end, I think much will depend on the attitude of Poland & Roumania.<sup>155</sup>

By 23 May, Chamberlain had swung round. However, he was unwilling to surrender completely, and asked Cadogan to insert a "League umbrella" by means of a reference to Article XVI of the Covenant into a draft alliance.<sup>156</sup> Harvey found this ironic. 'Really the wheel has come full circle', he noted on 24 May, 'when we have the PM who has done more than any responsible statesman to sidetrack Geneva, trying to cover himself with Geneva clothes in order to hide the shame of direct agreement with Soviet Russia.'<sup>157</sup>

All was revealed to the Cabinet on 24 May.<sup>158</sup> Halifax outlined Daladier's and Maisky's positions. After carefully parsing all arguments,

<sup>154</sup> Harvey diary entries, 21–24 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; Kennard to FO, tel 173 decipher, 22 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7524/3356/18, minute, Sargent (23 May).

<sup>155</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 21 May 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1100.

<sup>156</sup> Cadogan's diary entry, 23 May 1939, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 182; Cadogan's minute for Halifax, 23 May 1939, FO 371/23066/C7469/3356/18; Cadogan's draft, 23 May 1939, included with Cadogan to Chamberlain, 23 May 1939, Prem 1/409.

<sup>157</sup> Harvey diary entry, 24 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>158</sup> This and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on minutes, Cab 30(39), 24 May 1939, Cab 23/99; 'Negotiations with Russia', CP 115(39), Bridges, 17

the foreign secretary made his recommendation: 'he had never disguised from his colleagues his own views on the subject of a close association with the Russian Government. In present circumstances, however, he felt that it was not possible to contemplate a breakdown of the negotiations' and that a 'direct mutual guarantee agreement' with Moscow should be pursued. Chamberlain, too, made his obeisance to necessity and a pilgrimage to the Soviet Canossa. But what mattered now to both men was 'the question of presentation'. Here, Chamberlain unfurled his 'League umbrella'. He pointed out that his 'difficulties would be greatly decreased if . . . the arrangement could be presented as an interpretation . . . of the principles of the Covenant, rather on the lines of a regional Pact on the Locarno model under the League of Nations'.

This reflected both the realities of inter-war British foreign policy and Chamberlain's own political position. As he put it, such a presentation 'would make matters much easier for those who saw strong opposition to an association between this country and Russia' – by which he meant a goodly number of Conservatives – 'but who would not feel the same objection to an arrangement with Russia under the Covenant of the League'.<sup>159</sup> The latter approach would also find support among Liberals and Labourites who still nailed their colours to the mast (or at least to the memory) of collective security, and ensure Chamberlain of cross-bench support for (or, at least, less opposition to) his policy. To buttress his arguments, the prime minister also mentioned that several newspapers had articles suggesting that an arrangement with Soviet Russia under the auspices of the League's machinery was both appropriate and just – given Chamberlain's ability to inspire newspaper articles through the machinations of Sir Joseph Ball, it is a matter for speculation as to how fortuitous was this coincidence.<sup>160</sup> Given this attractive alternative, Chamberlain's colleagues quickly ran to shelter themselves from the 'red rain' under Chamberlain's 'League umbrella'. But what remained to be determined was the sincerity of Chamberlain's conversion and whether the Soviets would accept this new communicant's offering.

Some indication of the former was in a letter Chamberlain wrote to his sister on 28 May. In it, the prime minister outlined his travails, and revealed the complicated nature of his position. Chamberlain was aware

May 1939, Cab 24/286; 'Negotiations with Russia', CP 116(39), Bridges, 17 May 1939, Cab 24/286; 'Anglo-Soviet Negotiations', CP 123(39), Halifax, 22 May 1939, Cab 24/287.

<sup>159</sup> For examples, see Lord Muirhead to Halifax, 19 Apr 1939, and James Muir (editor, *Catholic Times*) to Halifax, 20 Apr 1939, both Halifax Papers, FO 800/322.

<sup>160</sup> Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, 11–15, 161–5, for examples, and see Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*', *Hj*, 33, 1(1990).

of the political pressure in favour of an alliance, but retained his 'deep suspicions of Soviet aims and profound doubts as to her military capacities even if she honestly desired & intended to help. But worse than that was my feeling that the alliance would definitely be a lining up of opposing blocs and an association which would make any negotiation or discussion with the totalitarians difficult if not impossible.'<sup>161</sup> Here were many of the beliefs and characteristics that had underpinned Chamberlain's view of strategic foreign policy since 1931. He disliked the Soviets and doubted their power, he was concerned about dividing Europe into groupings in the fashion of the pre-1914 era and, relatedly, he wished to keep a free hand so that Britain could negotiate with both sides. As Leo Amery noted, 'The trouble with Neville is that he is being pushed all the time into a policy which he does not like, and hates abandoning the last bridges which might still enable him to renew his former policy. So he vainly tries to avoid a war alliance with Russia.'<sup>162</sup> At bottom, Chamberlain wished to avoid war. Hitler's seizure of the rump of Czechoslovakia and Italy's invasion of Albania on 7 April had not yet disabused him of his belief that these two Powers could be dealt with by means of appeasement.

Chamberlain's 'League umbrella' allowed him to satisfy most of his concerns: 'In substance', he told his sister,

it gives the Russians what they want but in form and presentation it avoids the idea of an alliance and substitutes a declaration of our *intentions* in certain circumstances in fulfilment of our obligation under Art[icle] XVI of the Covenant. It is really a most ingenious idea for it is calculated to catch all the mugwumps and at the same time by tying the thing up to Art[icle] XVI we give it a temporary character. I have no doubt that one of these days Art[icle] XVI will be amended or repealed and that should give us the opportunity of revising our relations with the Soviet if we want to.<sup>163</sup>

Chamberlain's desire to avoid definite commitment and to play for time is evident, although there is also little doubt that, if forced by events, he would honour Britain's pledge. But, would such a reluctant promise be acceptable in Moscow? Seeds met Molotov on 27 May, and the Soviet commissar termed the British proposal 'unacceptable'. Molotov's reply went to the essence of what Chamberlain was trying to avoid; the draft showed that the British and French wanted 'to continue conversations indefinitely and not to bind themselves to any concrete engagements'.

<sup>161</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 28 May 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1101.

<sup>162</sup> Amery diary entry, 19 May 1940, in Barnes and Nicholson, *Empire at Bay*, 553.

<sup>163</sup> See n. 161.

Molotov was all too aware of the 'cumbrous' nature of the League's deliberations: 'the British and French were prepared to visualise Moscow being bombed by the aggressor while Bolivia was busy blocking all action in Geneva'.<sup>164</sup> Cadogan might term Molotov 'almost impossible to deal with', but 'the Hammer' understood the realities of the situation perfectly.<sup>165</sup>

On 29 May, Seeds had a further talk with Molotov, and attempted (as was done also in London with Maisky) to explain that the reference to the League Covenant was only to 'its principles not to its procedures'.<sup>166</sup> Seeds found Molotov difficult. The ambassador stated that the latter was a 'man totally ignorant of foreign affairs and to whom the idea of negotiation – as distinct from imposing the will of his party leader – is utterly alien' and was possessed of 'a rather foolish cunning of the type of the peasant'. This characterization was likely due to the contrast between the urbane and sophisticated Litvinov and the rough-hewn Molotov, but in substance, as Seeds himself noted, the new commissar merely repeated in blunter terms what Litvinov had maintained.<sup>167</sup> Molotov termed the Franco-Soviet Pact a 'paper delusion', and called instead for 'an immediate concrete arrangement', not circuitous, flexible drafts. This was met with sympathy at the Foreign Office, but neither Seeds nor London was willing to accept Molotov's demand that 'guarantees of protection' could be forced on countries – particularly the Baltic states and Finland – that did not desire them. As Molotov made clear in a public announcement at the Supreme Soviet on 31 May, an impasse had been reached: Soviet Russia was unwilling to pull other people's chestnuts out of the fire.<sup>168</sup>

None the less, Seeds retained some guarded optimism. Even in such circumstances he felt that an agreement with Soviet Russia could be obtained, though he advised of a need for firmness, as the Soviets were 'hard bargainers and must be met in similar spirit'. On the other hand, if Soviet Russia were 'playing with us and [were] really out for isolation, no further concessions on our part will serve any useful purpose'. He also doubted the possibility of a German-Soviet *rapprochement* – 'so

<sup>164</sup> Seeds to FO, disp 156, 28 May 1939, FO 371/23067/C7936/3356/18, Cadogan's minute (10 Jun).

<sup>165</sup> 'Molotov' was a *nom de guerre* derived from the Russian 'molot', 'hammer'. For a perceptive reaction, see Harvey diary entry, 29 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>166</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on Seeds to FO, tel 105, 29 May 1939, FO 371/23067/C7758/3356/18; Harvey diary entry, 29 May 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>167</sup> Seeds to FO, disp 161, 30 May 1939, FO 371/23067/C3737/3356/18, minutes.

<sup>168</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 108, 31 May 1939, FO 371/23067/C7886/3356/18.

remarkable a volte face' – coming to pass, as he believed that the British commitments to Poland, Romania and Turkey 'sufficiently covered' Soviet security needs.<sup>169</sup>

In London, Cadogan searched for a compromise. He admitted the strength of the Soviet concerns about the Baltic states, noting that the British would regard a German occupation of the Netherlands as a *casus belli*, even if the Dutch did not resist. However, the PUS rejected forcing a guarantee 'on either the Baltic States or Holland'. To take the advice of Seeds and refuse to compromise further seemed unwise, as to do so risked both public indignation and a possible Russo-German *rapprochement*. Cadogan suggested a way round the impasse. Britain would avoid forcing guarantees on the Baltic states, Switzerland and the Netherlands, but would 'make it clear . . . that our promise of assistance will become operative not only in the event of an act of aggression against Russia proper but in the event of any action against the Baltic States which constitutes such a threat to the security of Russia that the Soviet Government are compelled to embark on hostilities'. This smacked of sophistry, for it admitted the Soviet case concerning 'indirect aggression' in all but name, and – in a phrase that Chamberlain noted also 'might occur to us' – 'would probably be displeasing to the Baltic States on the ground that our offer of assistance was no longer dependent on their asking for help, was entirely dependent on the judgment of the Soviet Government'.<sup>170</sup>

Sargent raised another issue. He pointed out that Britain's guarantees, existing and in negotiation, were directed against 'any European state'. Thus, the possibility existed that Britain might be in the 'embarrassing' position of defending Soviet Russia against Poland and Poland and Romania against Soviet Russia. He preferred to add a 'contracting-out clause' so as to exclude such eventualities. However, he realized that to do so 'may arouse [suspicions] in the mind of the Soviet Government' and give the Germans a chance once more to trumpet the cry of 'encirclement'.<sup>171</sup>

These matters went before the Foreign Policy Committee on 5 June. Here, Halifax pointed out the difficulties with the Soviet concept of 'indirect aggression'. Chamberlain's unwillingness to accept either this or Cadogan's suggested compromise was evident. The prime minister preferred that, if any of the states refused to resist German aggression, then Britain, France and Soviet Russia would have to discuss the issue

<sup>169</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 109, 1 Jun 1939, FO 371/23067/C7895/3356/18.

<sup>170</sup> Cadogan to Chamberlain, 3 Jun 1939, covering 'Soviet objection to Anglo-French Proposals of May 26th', ns, 26 May 1939, Prem 1/409, Chamberlain's marginalia.

<sup>171</sup> Untitled memo, Sargent, 5 Jun 1939, FO 371/23067/C8064/3356/18.

before action could be taken. Chamberlain 'feared that M. Molotov wanted to get us to accept a formula under which it would be open to him to decide in any particular cases whether a *casus foederis* had arisen or not'. Not all agreed. Inskip argued that the Soviets merely wished to 'prevent delay'. What were possible future steps? Halifax outlined three options: to send a mission to Moscow, to invite the Soviets to come to London or to recall Seeds for consultation. The first choice he deemed unwise because 'it was undesirable to give the impression that we were running after the Russians'; the second was thought imprudent because no Soviet representative would be given full powers to negotiate a binding settlement. This left the third option, but the FPC preferred instead to send to Moscow experts from the Foreign Office who knew the FPC's views. This, it was felt, 'would give the impression that no great political difficulties were outstanding' and that only details remained.<sup>172</sup> In the event, it was decided not only to recall Seeds, but also to send experts back with him when he returned to Moscow.<sup>173</sup>

Everything was discussed at the Cabinet two days later.<sup>174</sup> Halifax was optimistic about finding a solution to the difficulties surrounding 'indirect aggression'. He also noted that negotiation via the exchange of telegrams was 'undesirable', and raised the issue of sending experts to Moscow. Seeds could not now be withdrawn as he had become ill, and the Cabinet decided that Sir William Makins, the legal adviser to the Foreign Office, could not be spared to go to Moscow. Halifax reiterated the point about not appearing to run after the Soviets. The Cabinet agreed, and Chamberlain outlined the state of negotiations in the Commons the following day. By 8 June, matters were proceeding, if slowly. By this time, it had been decided that Strang should go to Moscow. Some were aware of the need for care: 'The Russians are so suspicious', Harvey wrote, 'that it is essential if we are to get our agreement to take the most extraordinary precautions that our procedure or approach does not arouse mistrust.' However, he concluded: 'But the PM cannot see this and even H[alifax] is not very imaginative where the Bolsheviks are concerned.'<sup>175</sup>

Halifax did, however, attempt to smooth any possible rufflings of Maisky's feathers. On 8 June, the foreign secretary told the Soviet ambassador of the state of British thinking. Halifax reiterated the points he had made in Cabinet, and told Maisky that any insistence that

<sup>172</sup> FP(36), minutes, 49th meeting, 5 Jun 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>173</sup> FO to Seeds, tel 129, 6 Jun 1939, FO 371/23067/C7970/3356/18.

<sup>174</sup> Minutes, Cab 31(39), 7 Jun 1939, Cab 23/99.

<sup>175</sup> Harvey diary entry, 8 Jun 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.



military conversations had to be concluded before a pact could be agreed upon 'tended to make dangerous delay'. Further, he thought that the inclusion of a 'no separate peace' clause was premature, and that this should await 'if and when we were launched into war and were all agreed as to the aims we sought to achieve'. Finally, he explained that he himself could not go to Moscow due to the press of business. Surprisingly, Maisky did not object, and spoke highly of Strang's abilities, citing the latter's work in Moscow during Eden's trip.<sup>176</sup>

However, it was difficult to know Maisky's true views (possibly the Soviet ambassador tailored his remarks to fit his audience). On 9 June, the ambassador contradicted much that he had said to Halifax in an interview with Ewer of the *Daily Herald*. Maisky characterized the British negotiations as being "oriental and [employing] bazaar technique". Soviet suspicions resulted from the fact that it seemed as if the British government was 'at bottom opposed to a pact and was reluctantly and gradually being pushed against its will into making one'. He also professed himself 'very unenthusiastic about Strang's going . . . [as] Strang was not "big enough"'. However, there were points of substance in the interview. Ewer gained the impression that the issue of indirect aggression could be worked out, but that the issue of a separate peace – despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that it would 'not be honoured if duress or strong self interest dictated otherwise' – might 'decide the success or failure of the whole negotiation'. Ewer also made the point that military conversations seemed 'a test of bona fides' to the Soviets. He suggested that the Foreign Office might state that they would begin 'the moment the agreement is signed'. This suggestion was thought apposite by Cadogan and essential by Vansittart. The chief diplomatic adviser argued that the negotiations 'badly need[ed] a leg up' if they were to succeed and that such a proposal might provide the necessary impetus for success.<sup>177</sup>

On 9 June, Strang was briefed as to his mission by the FPC.<sup>178</sup> As he prepared to depart, a minor problem arose when Francis Lindley, the former British ambassador to Japan, addressed the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, denounced the negotiations with Soviet Russia and stated 'that it would redound more to our prestige if these negotiations failed than if it were thought we had accepted them on Russian terms'. As Lindley had 'been the PM's host at Whitsun, it is taken as further proof here and in Russia that the PM is

<sup>176</sup> Halifax's conversation with Maisky, 8 Jun 1939, FO 371/23068/C8214/3356/18.

<sup>177</sup> Ewer's talk with Maisky, 9 Jun 1939, FO 371/23068/C8701/3356/18, minutes, Cadogan (15 Jun), Halifax (15 Jun) and Vansittart (16 Jun). It was perhaps significant that Ewer had been a Soviet agent earlier in the decade.

<sup>178</sup> FP(36), minutes, 50th meeting, 9 Jun 1939, Cab 27/625.

not genuine in his desire for the agreement'.<sup>179</sup> This, of course, was not entirely wide of the mark. Chamberlain was pursuing the negotiation out of necessity, and was full of suspicion: 'I can't make up my mind', he wrote to his sister, 'whether the Bolshies are double crossing us and trying to make difficulties or whether they are only showing the cunning & suspicion of the peasant.' While he 'incline[d] to the latter view', the prime minister revealed his tendency to see all matters only as they affected him, his career and his control of events. He believed that the Soviets were 'greatly encouraged by the opposition and the Winston [Churchill] Eden Lloyd George group with whom Maisky is in constant touch'. He linked all his *bêtes noires* together in a plot. An offer by Eden to go to Moscow as a negotiator (a suggestion that Lloyd George not only had repeated but also had augmented by suggesting that Churchill might serve as an alternative go-between if Eden were thought unsuitable) was viewed with profound distrust: 'I have no doubt that the three of them talked it over together, and that they saw in it a means of entry into the Cabinet and perhaps later on a substitution of a more amenable PM!'<sup>180</sup> This tendency to conflate matters of state with matters of personal and political import meant that much in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations depended on Chamberlain's personal whims, irritations and fears, a dangerous state of affairs at a time when 'our Russian negotiations are now the most important factor in the situation'.<sup>181</sup>

While Seeds and Strang negotiated with Molotov, suddenly the Far East intruded. The refusal of the British in the Tientsin Concession to hand over four accused terrorists to the Japanese resulted in the latter's blockading the territory.<sup>182</sup> The British were now faced with two crises, creating the worst possible strategical problems. Neville Henderson was, indeed, right for a change when he summarized that British policy now had to decide on coming to terms with 'Japan or Russia, or both?'<sup>183</sup> Both issues were discussed at the FPC on 19 June.<sup>184</sup> The circumstances in Europe and the realities of power in the Far East circumscribed British options. The COS made it clear that 'without the active co-operation of the United States of America, it would not be justifiable, from the

<sup>179</sup> Minute, Peake (News Department) for Cadogan, 9 Jun 1939, FO 371/23068/C8370/3356/18; following quotation from Harvey diary entry, 9 Jun 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>180</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 10 Jun 1939, Chamberlain Papers NC 18/1/1102.

<sup>181</sup> Halifax to Henderson, 14 Jun 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/315.

<sup>182</sup> Antony Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor. Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936-1941* (London and New York, 1995), 71-4; 'Background of the Tientsin incident', ns, nd (but c. 16 Jun), Prem 1/316.

<sup>183</sup> Henderson to Halifax, 17 Jun 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/315.

<sup>184</sup> FP(36), minutes, 52nd meeting, 19 Jun 1939, Cab 27/625.

military point of view, having regard to the existing international situation, to take any avoidable action which might lead to hostilities with Japan'. This view was shared by the Foreign Office, and only an 'embargo and/or discriminatory duties' were thought likely to provide the British with any lever to use against the Japanese.<sup>185</sup> More information was needed. A flurry of telegrams ensued. In London, Halifax spoke with the American and Japanese ambassadors.<sup>186</sup> These consultations made Craigie's suggestion that he be allowed to attempt to ameliorate matters in Tokyo the most attractive option. This conclusion was reinforced at a political level by Runciman's opinion that 'to adopt a pugnacious attitude in the present position would be most imprudent and might indeed be suicidal'.<sup>187</sup> Thus, it was not surprising that, at the FPC on 20 June, Craigie was authorized to find a compromise suitable to both sides, a position that the Cabinet confirmed the following day.<sup>188</sup>

But Tientsin had revealed the precariousness of the British position. 'Foreign policy is a unit', Harvey noted on 24 June, 'we cannot be weak in China and strong in Europe. It is all or nothing'.<sup>189</sup> How to do this? The negotiations with Soviet Russia spoke directly to both geographic locales. Craigie had warned, even before Tientsin, that any Anglo-Soviet agreement would affect Anglo-Japanese relations for the worse and influence the Japanese decision whether to sign a new Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>190</sup> All would depend on events. On 15 and 17 June, Seeds and Strang presented the British proposals to Molotov. The Soviet commissar was adamant that, if the British continued to refuse to name the Baltic states, the negotiations were clearly 'not . . . ripe for settlement'.<sup>191</sup> Cadogan, beset by Tientsin on the one hand and Molotov ('an ignorant and suspicious peasant') on the other, was frustrated and

<sup>185</sup> Amery to Buchan, 19 Jun 1939, Buchan Papers, Box 11; 'Economic Retaliation Against Japan', FP (36) 94, Halifax and Stanley, 16 Jun 1939, 'Retaliation for the Tientsin Blockade', FP (36) 95, secret, Halifax, 16 Jun 1939, 'The Situation in the Far East', FP (36) 96 (also COS 928), COS, 18 Jun 1939, all Cab 27/627.

<sup>186</sup> Craigie to FO, tels 594 and 595, 18 Jun 1939, and reply, tel 306, 19 Jun 1939, all FO 371/23400/F6017/1/10; Craigie to FO, tel 608, 19 Jun 1939, FO 371/23400/F6036/1/10; Clark Kerr to FO, tels 569 and 570, 19 Jun 1939, FO 371/23400/F6074/1/10; Halifax to Chamberlain, 19 Jun 1939, and enclosures, Prem 1/316; Cadogan diary entry, 19 Jun 1939, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 188–9.

<sup>187</sup> Runciman to Chamberlain, 19 Jun 1939, Prem 1/316.

<sup>188</sup> FP(36), minutes, 53rd meeting, 20 Jun 1939, Cab 27/625; minutes, Cab 33(39), 21 Jun 1939, Cab 23/100.

<sup>189</sup> Harvey diary entry, 24 Jun 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>190</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 487, 26 May 1939, FO 371/23561/F5061/456/23; Craigie to FO, tel 521, 7 Jun 1939, FO 371/23561/F5433/456/23; Craigie to FO, tel 536, 9 Jun 1939, FO 371/23561/F5583/456/23.

<sup>191</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 125, 15 Jun 1939, FO 371/23068/C8506/3356/18; Seeds to FO, tel 127, 17 Jun 1939, FO 371/23068/C8598/3356/18.

annoyed by the 'intolerable – and suspicious – mulishness of the Russians in our negotiations'.<sup>192</sup> 'The Russian blackmail', one disgruntled observer noted, 'is never-ending'.<sup>193</sup>

But matters had to move on. By 21 June, London had decided that Soviet Russia would be guaranteed against Polish aggression despite any objections from Warsaw.<sup>194</sup> Equally, the British would accept a 'no separate peace' clause if necessary.<sup>195</sup> However, on that same day, the Soviet commissar rejected any proposal that did not specifically name the eight countries that Britain, France and Soviet Russia would defend. Halifax professed himself 'bewildered' by Molotov's reply. The foreign secretary adjured Seeds to attempt 'to find out what is really at the back of M. Molotov's mind and what he is holding out for'. In a tactfully excised phrase, Halifax also noted: 'I realise the difficulty of dealing with a man of such inarticulate obstinacy'.<sup>196</sup>

This point was important. Personalities complicated negotiations. From Moscow, Strang reported on the difficulties of dealing with Molotov.<sup>197</sup> While Molotov was 'genial' in manner, in contrast to 'previous occasions', the 'mechanics of negotiation' were clumsy. Molotov knew 'no foreign language; he knows very little at first hand about the outside world; and he is not yet familiar with the subject matter of foreign relations or the technique of diplomatic negotiation'. While Molotov's position as a confidant of Stalin meant that the former was 'nearer to the final source of authority than Litvinov ever was' and 'has very clear ideas about the essential objects of Soviet policy in these negotiations, there is little give and take in the discussions and he seems to be quite impervious to argument'. It was no wonder that at the Foreign Office someone could note that 'We knew already that M. Molotov was one of the most tiresome men in Europe, but we are still in the dark as to what – if anything – is at the back of his mind'.<sup>198</sup>

But if Molotov was hard to bargain with, Strang also was aware that much of the difficulty was due to the weakness of the British position. The British guarantees 'have relieved the Soviet Government of anxiety

<sup>192</sup> Cadogan diary entry, 20 Jun 1939, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 189.

<sup>193</sup> Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Buchan, 19 Jun 1939, Buchan Paper, Box 11.

<sup>194</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 134, 20 Jun 1939, minutes, yielding FO to Seeds, tel 146, 21 Jun 1939, all FO 371/23068/C8711/3356/18.

<sup>195</sup> Minutes, Cab 33(39), 21 Jun 1939, Cab 23/100.

<sup>196</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 135, 21 Jun 1939, and reply, FO to Seeds, tel 148, 22 Jun 1939, both FO 371/23068/C8769/3356/18.

<sup>197</sup> This and the following paragraph, except where indicated, are based on Strang to Sargent, 21 Jun 1939, FO 371/23069/C9010/3356/18.

<sup>198</sup> Minute by Kirkpatrick (24 Jun) on Seeds to FO, disp 182, 21 Jun 1939, FO 371/23069/C8867/3356/18.

for the greater part of their western frontier. They can therefore afford – if we assume that they want a treaty at all – to stand out for their own terms . . . and, so far as we can see, they have not yet receded one jot.’ Strang felt that the Soviets were aware that British public opinion desired a treaty and thus believed ‘that if they stand pat our public will force us to give way to them’.<sup>199</sup> Still, he was confident that ‘we shall arrive at something in the end’. However, that end might be rather distant. The French ambassador had remarked humorously to Strang that ‘he will probably have reached the age-limit and gone into retirement before I get away from Moscow’.

On 23 June, Seeds told Halifax that no further ‘argumentation and skilful formulae’ were likely to achieve anything. The Soviets were insistent either that states be named or that ‘a simple Treaty of Mutual Guarantee against direct aggression’ be signed. The reasons for this were straightforward: the Soviets were ‘suspicious by nature’ and had ‘little confidence in the good faith and resolution of [the] Western Powers in the light of the past experience’. As a result ‘they wish the obligations to be assumed by the three Powers to be set down in black and white and to be clear beyond dispute’. Seeds also believed that Moscow wanted ‘some international warrant’ should they go ‘to the assistance of the Baltic States, even perhaps without the assent or contrary to the wishes of the Governments concerned’.<sup>200</sup> Similar matters were discussed in London. That same day, Halifax asked Maisky ‘point blank’ whether the Soviets desired a treaty. When Maisky replied ‘of course’ and asked why Halifax should make such a query, the foreign secretary’s irritation at the style of the negotiations was evident: ‘Because, I replied, throughout the negotiations the Soviet Government had not budged a single inch and we had made all the advances and concessions.’ Maisky admitted that the Soviets should perhaps not have set out ‘their irreducible minimum’ initially, but instead should ‘have asked for more than they wanted so as to be able subsequently to make concessions’. But he did not hint at any possible compromise. Halifax concluded his interview with yet another fulmination – ‘I said that saying No to everything was not my idea of negotiation and that it had a striking resemblance to Nazi methods of dealing with international questions’ – but the foreign secretary clearly got the point.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Some in the Labour Party were concerned that to continue to push the government in the House of Commons would result in the Soviets’ refusing to compromise: see Dalton diary entry, 10 Jul 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 279.

<sup>200</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 139, 23 Jun 1939, FO 371/23069/C8928/3356/18.

<sup>201</sup> Halifax’s conversation with Maisky, 23 Jun 1939, FO 371/23069/C8979/3356/18; Maisky’s attitude also from Dalton diary entry, 25 Jun 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 272–3.

This was evident at the FPC on 26 June.<sup>202</sup> There, Halifax put the Soviet case clearly. While Chamberlain was irate that Britain had 'made concession after concession' without any Soviet reciprocation, the foreign secretary noted that the Soviets 'were content to go on bargaining so as to secure the highest terms possible'.<sup>203</sup> The prime minister remained obdurate about not including the names of those states to be protected in the treaty, putting forward instead the idea that they might be included in a 'secret protocol'. When Halifax, Stanley and MacDonald all opposed this idea as not being practicable, Chamberlain countered with a proposal for a vague formula that avoided naming names. Here, he found support from Morrison, who worried that Molotov's proposal 'gave the document a strong encirclement flavour'. But Morrison's unhappiness went further and underlined the dislike and suspicion of Soviet Russia that always existed just below the surface for many: he

was apprehensive to [sic] our getting involved in a European struggle with Soviet Russia standing outside, and he did not, himself, believe that there was an honest difference of opinion between France and ourselves on the one hand and Soviet Russia on the other as to the best way of attaining the common objective. He thought, on the other hand, that the objective of Soviet Russia was a different one to that of France and ourselves.

Despite this, the decision was to face reality, and to agree that, in the last resort, Seeds could accept an agreement that named names, providing that the Netherlands and Switzerland were inserted if the Baltic states were included. This conclusion was sent to Seeds on 27 June, although it was noted that Chamberlain's suggested 'private agreement' would be a preferable alternative.<sup>204</sup>

Thus, by the last few days of June, British strategic foreign policy was in the process of negotiation. Craigie was set to begin talks in Tokyo, and Seeds was attempting in Moscow to find a diplomatic way out.<sup>205</sup> These conversations were made all the more urgent by the continuing German pressure over Danzig, about which there were disquieting rumours emanating from France.<sup>206</sup> To stiffen resistance while negotiations

<sup>202</sup> This paragraph, except where indicated, is based on FP(36), minutes, 54th meeting, 26 Jun 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>203</sup> See also Dalton diary entry, 28 Jun 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 276–8.

<sup>204</sup> FO to Seeds, tel 151, 27 Jun 1939, FO 371/23069/C8928/3356/18; minutes, Cab 34 (39), 28 Jun 1939, Cab 23/100.

<sup>205</sup> Craigie to FO, tel 675, 27 Jun 1939, FO 371/23401/F6449/1/10.

<sup>206</sup> Harvey diary entry, 1 Jul 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395; N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 2 Jul 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1105; Cadogan diary entry, 3 Jul 1939, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 191.

continued in Soviet Russia, Halifax made a speech at Chatham House on 29 June, whose 'chief object was to convince the Germans once and for all that we had reached the limit of unilateral concession'.<sup>207</sup> On 1 July, Seeds saw Molotov, who found the British draft 'too vague', but accepted the idea of naming the protected states in an 'unpublished annex'. However, he was not willing to add the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland to the British list of states and wanted a definition of 'indirect aggression' inserted. At the Foreign Office, it was thought that the Soviets were 'only procrastinating and do not want an effective agreement',<sup>208</sup> and Halifax was 'beginning to get impatient with them'. Chamberlain, too, allowed that he was 'grow[ing] more & more suspicious of their [the Soviets'] good faith' and was annoyed by continuing reports in the press that an agreement was imminent. However, he was aware of the political realities within the Cabinet: 'My colleagues are so desperately anxious for it [an agreement] & so nervous of the consequences of failure to achieve that I have to go very warily, but I am so sceptical of the value of Russian help that I should not feel that our position was greatly worsened if we had to do without them.'<sup>209</sup> In this situation, it was not surprising that Oliver Harvey noted exasperatedly on 1 July that 'negotiations are now in a proper mess – chiefly owing to the slowness and reluctance with which we first tackled . . . Soviet Russia. This Government will never get anything done.'<sup>210</sup>

Molotov's reply was discussed at the Foreign Policy Committee on 4 July.<sup>211</sup> Halifax saw two possible responses: 'to break off the negotiations' or 'to fall back on the limited Tripartite Pact'. He favoured the latter, arguing that 'our main object in the negotiations was to prevent Russia from engaging herself with Germany' and that prolonged negotiations were dangerous. This was an interesting admission, but it emphasized Halifax's belief in the limited utility of actual Soviet aid. However, the FPC's discussion turned on other points. Hoare argued that Molotov's definition of 'indirect aggression' was harder to accept than the 'exclusion of Switzerland and the Netherlands'. Runciman was all for the pact, maintaining that the public paid little attention to details of such agreements and 'would be quite satisfied with a simple Tripartite

<sup>207</sup> Halifax to Henderson, 30 Jun 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/315.

<sup>208</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 148, 1 Jul 1939, FO 371/23069/C9229/3356/18, Roberts's minute (3 Jul).

<sup>209</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 2 Jul 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1105. See also Dalton diary entry, 28 Jun 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 276.

<sup>210</sup> Harvey diary entry, 1 Jul 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>211</sup> This and the following two paragraphs, except where indicated, are based on FP(36), minutes, 56th meeting, 4 Jul 1939, Cab 27/625.

Pact'. Stanley 'entirely disagreed'. He asserted that such an anodyne agreement would be seen as 'concealing a complete breakdown of the negotiations'. It would not cover Danzig and Poland generally, which was the point of the exercise.

Halifax's response highlighted his difficulties. Further discussions would be 'interminable', the Soviet government had 'not been helpful' in the talks to date and, most importantly, 'M. Molotov's definition of indirect aggression was very difficult to swallow and would put us in Russia's power'. Stanley demurred. He argued that, 'if we cared to be cynical', Molotov's definition might be accepted and that 'if it ever came within sight of having to be implemented we could differ from Soviet Russia on every point of its implementation'. When Simon professed that to do what Stanley suggested would prove 'most embarrassing' in Parliament, Halifax made clear what he thought of the entire matter:

on the day the Soviet Government would act as suited them best at the time, and without the slightest regard to any prior undertakings written or otherwise. If, for example, war arose out of the Polish situation, and the Soviet Government thought the moment opportune for the partition of Poland they would partition it with Germany without a qualm. If, on the other hand, they thought it preferable in their own interests to fight Germany then they would support and assist Poland.

'This might be a very cynical appreciation', he concluded, 'but it went far to reconcile him to making a narrower arrangement with Soviet Russia, i.e. a simple Tripartite Pact, than he would be prepared to make with a partner in whom he felt trust and confidence.'

Further discussion centred on the matter of 'indirect aggression'. Stanley maintained his position that such a definition could be accepted in order to get an agreement (and be disputed in the implementation). Morrison, Inskip, Simon and Chamberlain demurred, with their arguments ranging from the objections of the states to be named, through the idea that the 'definition embodied and resurrected the old notion of an ideological war', to the argument that it 'seemed to imply', in Inskip's confused words, 'that we should come to the assistance of Soviet Russia in any case, where, in the view of the Soviet Government there had been a change of regime in a European country in the interests of some other country which was ready and willing to take advantage of that change of regime'. After further tangled discussion, it was agreed that the Soviets should be asked to choose between two alternatives: (1) one in which the British dropped Switzerland and the Netherlands from the secret protocol in exchange for the elimination of the Soviet definition of indirect aggression; (2) a Tripartite Pact. At the Cabinet on 5 July, it was agreed



that the Soviet definition of indirect aggression was 'entirely unacceptable' and the FPC's decisions were confirmed.<sup>212</sup> The next move would be Molotov's.

The process of negotiation was tiring and caused tempers to flare. Cadogan, overworked and anxious to get away on holiday, was particularly vehement: the Soviets were 'dirty sweeps', while 'being incredibly tiresome' and 'simply mulish'.<sup>213</sup> No one was immune to this discontent. 'The Russian business is quite infuriating', Halifax wrote on 7 July, 'it blocks everything and frays everybody's nerves', and Henderson was suspicious that 'the interminable haggling of the Soviets' might be a mask for their desire to end the talks.<sup>214</sup> Molotov's response to the British proposal did not improve matters.<sup>215</sup> On 8 and 10 July, he offered a new definition of indirect aggression, which Halifax termed 'unacceptable'. After substantial discussion, the FPC decided to attempt to trade a British agreement to hold immediate military talks (which had the added advantage, in Halifax's words, that 'so long as the military conversations were taking place we should be preventing Soviet Russia from entering the German camp') for a Soviet agreement to drop their definition of indirect aggression.<sup>216</sup> The British also agreed to accept the Soviet list of states. This willingness to compromise, Harvey believed, meant that 'H[is] M[ajesty's] G[overnment] [were] getting more ready for agreement at any price for political reasons'.<sup>217</sup> This was not the case. Despite the advice of Sir Edmund Ironside, the CIGS, that an alliance with Soviet Russia 'was the only thing we could do' to defend Poland, Chamberlain remained adamantly opposed.<sup>218</sup> The 'stiff' British note of 12 July made further concessions unlikely: 'we are nearing the point where we clearly cannot continue the process of conceding each fresh demand . . . [and the British government] may have to reconsider their whole position'.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Minutes, Cab 35(39), 5 Jul 1939, Cab 23/100; FO to Seeds, tels 160, 161 and 162, 6 Jul 1939, FO 371/23070/C9295/3356/18.

<sup>213</sup> Cadogan diary entries, 28 June, 3 Jul and 4 July, in Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 190–1.

<sup>214</sup> Halifax to Phipps, 7 Jul 1939, Phipps Papers, PHPP 1/23; Henderson to Halifax, 11 Jul 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/316.

<sup>215</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 155, 8 Jul 1939, and reply, tel 164, 10 Jul 1939, both FO 371/32070/C9566/3356/18.

<sup>216</sup> Molotov's offers in 'Anglo-Soviet Negotiations', Roberts, 10 Jul 1939, FO 371/23070/C9709/3356/18; FP(36), minutes, 57th meeting, 10 Jul 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>217</sup> Harvey diary entry, 9 Jul 1939, Harvey Papers, Add MSS 56395.

<sup>218</sup> Ironside diary entry 10 Jul 1939, in R. Macleod and D. Kelly, eds., *The Ironside Diaries 1937–1940* (London, 1962), 78.

<sup>219</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 15 July 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1107; FO to Seeds, tel 167, 12 Jul 1939, FO 371/23070/C9709/3356/18, Chamberlain's attached note; minutes, Cab 37(39), 12 Jul 1939, Cab 23/100.

On 15 July, Chamberlain wrote that Halifax was 'at last getting "fed up" with Molotov whom he describes as maddening'.<sup>220</sup> The foreign secretary's temper could not have been improved by Molotov's rejection of the British proposals.<sup>221</sup> By 19 July, there was deadlock. At the Cabinet that morning and at a meeting of the FPC immediately afterwards, Halifax made it clear that he would prefer a complete breakdown of talks to an acceptance of the Soviet position.<sup>222</sup> While Maisky continued to try to persuade 'left-wing enthusiasts . . . how right is the Soviet definition of "indirect aggression"', this made no impression on Halifax.<sup>223</sup> As the foreign secretary told one correspondent, the Soviet interpretation was something to which 'we cannot, of course, possibly agree'. He was confident that he had squared the opposition, and thus was not 'apprehensive of Parliamentary criticism if we were to break with the Soviet Government on this point'.<sup>224</sup> Both he and the prime minister rejected the idea of recalling Strang for consultation and believed that it was time to call what they thought was the Soviet bluff.<sup>225</sup> This decision was sent to Seeds on 21 July.<sup>226</sup>

The result was movement. On 23 July, Molotov conceded that an agreement to hold military talks meant that some compromise could be reached on the issue of indirect aggression. Seeds was mildly optimistic. He hoped that immediate military negotiations might lead to success overall, as they would strengthen the position of those Soviets who held the view that the British, while 'imbued with a spirit of "capitulating" if possible to Axis Powers', could be 'squeezed by our press and public and by Russian pressure, relentlessly applied, into an agreement with this country'.<sup>227</sup> The FPC agreed on 26 July that no more compromises could be made and that Seeds should continue to negotiate as best he could.<sup>228</sup> The stage was set for military talks.

However, at this juncture, the Far East again intruded. To Chamberlain's delight, Craigie had got round the 'ineptitude' of the Foreign

<sup>220</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 15 Jul 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 1/1/1107.

<sup>221</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 165, 17 Jul 1939, FO 371/23070/C10054/3356/18.

<sup>222</sup> Minutes, Cab 38(39), 19 Jul 1939, Cab 23/100; FP(36), minutes, 58th meeting, Cab 27/625.

<sup>223</sup> Nicolson diary entry, 20 Jul 1939, in Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 406.

<sup>224</sup> Halifax to Sir Bernard Pares (academic expert on Russia), 19 Jul 1939, Halifax Papers, FO 800/309. See also Dalton diary entry, 12 Jul 1939, in Pimlott, *Dalton Diary*, 280–1.

<sup>225</sup> See also Headlam diary entry, 24 Jul 1939, in Ball, *Headlam Diaries*, 162.

<sup>226</sup> FO to Seeds, tels 175 and 176, both 21 Jul 1939, FO 371/23070/C10054/3356/18.

<sup>227</sup> Seeds to FO, tels 170 and 172 decipher, 23 July 1939, FO 371/2301/C10319 and C10325/3356/18. Molotov's quick reply was perhaps due to the fact that he had been kept abreast of the British position by a spy in the Foreign Office: see D. Cameron Watt, 'Francis Herbert King: A Soviet Source in the Foreign Office', *INS*, 3, 4 (1988), 62–82.

<sup>228</sup> FP(36), minutes, 59th meeting, 26 Jul 1939, Cab 27/625.

Office and was moving ahead with talks with the Japanese. On 24 July, Craigie had signed an agreement with Arita Hachirō, the Japanese foreign minister, that allowed the quarrel to be discussed on terms acceptable to both sides. The linkage between the Soviet negotiations and Tientsin was immediately apparent.<sup>229</sup> On 25 July, Maisky enquired pointedly whether the agreement adumbrated a change in British policy in the Far East. The Soviet ambassador was particularly interested in the pending British loan to China, and suggested that 'many people' would view it as a 'test case' for British policy. The implication was plain: if the loan were not granted, the Craigie-Arita agreement would be seen as marking a British change towards a pro-Japanese (and, hence, by implication, anti-Soviet) policy.<sup>230</sup> From Tokyo, Craigie pushed to have the loan delayed, lest it affect his negotiations. To him, even the American denunciation of their commercial treaty with Japan on 26 July did not mean that Washington could be relied on. This led to a three-cornered debate between Craigie, Clark Kerr and the Foreign Office, while, in London, the Cabinet delayed any decision.<sup>231</sup> As a result, Craigie's talks with Arita were suspended. But while this was primarily an issue that involved Britain, Japan and the United States, it was clear that Soviet Russia would be an interested spectator.

In late July, the British moved quickly to select the personnel for the military mission to Soviet Russia and to decide how to co-ordinate with the French. In the end, it was decided that a British admiral should represent the Anglo-French naval position, while a French general should do the same for military matters. How to travel became a point of some discussion (and later historical contention). The Foreign Office initially thought that sending the mission to Soviet Russia by means of a naval squadron would 'not only please the Russians but would make a considerable impression' on the Baltic neutrals, as well as serving as a 'gentle reminder to the Germans that we do not regard the Baltic as a

<sup>229</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 15 Jul 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1107; W. B. Brown (permanent secretary, B of T) to Cadogan, 6 Jul 1939, Prem 1/314; Halifax to Stanley, 13 Jul 1939, and the minutes on the ensuing correspondence, all Prem 1/314; Lindsay to FO, tel 315, 15 Jul 1939, FO 371/23527/F7395/6457/10, minutes. For the negotiations, see Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, 79–85, which informs the following.

<sup>230</sup> Halifax's interview with Maisky, 25 Jul 1939, FO 371/23528/F7951/6857/10.

<sup>231</sup> Craigie to Howe, 21 Jul 1939, FO 371/23551/F9374/4027/61, minutes; Clark Kerr to FO, tel 800, FO 371/23528/F8151/6457/10, minutes; Craigie to FO, tel 913, 1 Aug 1939, FO 371/23528/F8245/6457/10, minutes; minutes, Cab 40(39), 2 Aug 1939, Cab 23/100.

German sea'.<sup>232</sup> But the French were divided on this matter. General Joseph Doumenc, the head of the French delegation, favoured going by rail across Germany, but General Maurice Gamelin, the French commander-in-chief, preferred that the mission travel either by 'cruiser or by air'.<sup>233</sup> At the Quai d'Orsay, there was 'a fear that if [the] mission arrived by [a] method of travel which might appear spectacular, any hitch or dragging out of discussions might be given correspondingly more serious appearance'. With Henderson advising from Berlin that a trip across Germany by train 'appears to me unnecessarily provocative and might possibly lead to unpleasantness or incident' – and, in fact, suggesting that the 'mission should try to avoid [crossing] Germany altogether', even by air – it was decided to charter a passenger ship for an 'unostentatious' method of travel.<sup>234</sup> The result was that the mission left on 5 August on board *The City of Exeter*, landed at Leningrad and travelled by train to Moscow, arriving on 11 August.<sup>235</sup>

The mission, headed by Admiral Sir Reginald Ernle-Earle-Plunkett-Drax, who had been serving at the Admiralty as a strategical adviser to the First Sea Lord, also needed to have its terms of reference defined. This was done at a series of meetings of the deputy chiefs of staff (DCOS).<sup>236</sup> The most interesting aspect was what the DCOS believed to be the military capabilities of the Soviets and the nature of their character. With respect to the former, there were three general points: the Purges had impaired the effectiveness of all branches of the Soviet armed forces, the size of the Soviet army was 'misleading' as to its strength and the Soviets were 'most unwilling' to allow their forces to be located in areas where they might be infected by 'bourgeois influence'. As a result, 'substantial and rapid Russian military support to Poland is out of the question'. The value of the Soviet forces in the Far East was higher. There, the Red Army 'would at least exercise a

<sup>232</sup> The minutes in FO 371/23071/C10525/3356/18; 'Anglo-French-Soviet Negotiations', R. C. S. Stevenson (acting counsellor, FO), 25 Jul 1939, FO 371/23071/C10634/3356/18.

<sup>233</sup> Campbell (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, Paris) to FO, tel 478, 29 Jul 1939, and reply, tel 236, 1 Aug 1939, both FO 371/23071/C10621/3356/18.

<sup>234</sup> Henderson to FO, tel 414, 31 Jul 1939, FO 371/23071/C10615/3356/18; FP(36), minutes 60th meeting, 1 Aug 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>235</sup> The itinerary and the composition of the British delegation in 'Staff Conversations with Russia', DCOS 158, Hollis (secretary, CID), 3 Aug 1939, Cab 54/10. The decision to travel by (slow) boat has often been taken as evidence of Britain and France's reluctance to treat with Moscow – for example, Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Alliance That Failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance Negotiations, 1939', *EHQ*, 26, 3 (1996), 406. This seems wrong.

<sup>236</sup> DCOS, minutes 43rd, 45th and 46th meetings, 27 Jul, 30 Jul and 31 Jul 1939, Cab 54/2.

containing influence on Japan in Manchukuo and China'. Negotiations with the Soviets were expected to be difficult, as 'the Russian is suspicious by nature and a hard bargainer'. Equally, 'the Russian is himself given to exaggerating, and may therefore expect it from others. It may be well, therefore, for us to make the most of, rather than to minimise, what we have got.'<sup>237</sup>

The implications of these and the rest of the instructions were discussed at the CID on 2 August. At the meeting, Drax pointed out that, while he 'assumed' that the military mission should 'reach a quick decision', his instructions directed that he 'go slowly and cautiously until such time as the Political agreement was reached'. The admiral was concerned that the latter line might make it difficult to reach the political accord. Halifax agreed that this was so, and admitted that the military mission 'had a very difficult task'. With the difficulties admitted, Drax professed himself 'quite content', but enquired as to whether it was felt that the Soviets actually intended to conclude the political agreement. Halifax's reply, 'that it was almost impossible to say whether the Russians really wished to conclude this agreement', reflected the annoyance and suspicion that several months of negotiating with Molotov had produced.<sup>238</sup> These feelings were exemplified by Chamberlain; as he had told the Foreign Policy Committee on 26 July, '[i]t was most humiliating to have our proposals consistently and summarily rejected' by the Soviets and Molotov in particular.<sup>239</sup>

While these deliberations took place, Seeds pushed ahead at Moscow. The issue of indirect aggression seemed intractable, and Molotov, pending the arrival of the military mission, opposed making any communiqué about the state of the talks.<sup>240</sup> Thus, Butler's statement in the House of Commons on 31 July on the state of the negotiations raised some ire in Moscow.<sup>241</sup> With the Poles continuing to oppose any 'commitments involving Poland or the Baltic countries', it was evident that the negotiations in Moscow would be difficult.<sup>242</sup>

<sup>237</sup> 'Staff Conversations with Russia', R. F. Adam (DCIGS), R. E. C. Peirse (deputy Chief of Air Staff) and T. S. V. Phillips (deputy Chief of Naval Staff), 31 Jul 1939, Cab 54/10.

<sup>238</sup> Minutes, 372nd meeting CID, 2 Aug 1939, Cab 2/9.

<sup>239</sup> FP(36), minutes 59th meeting, 26 Jul 1939, Cab 27/625.

<sup>240</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 179, 27 Jul 1939, FO 371/23071/C10580/3356/18; untitled memo, Kirkpatrick, 29 Jul 1939, Prem 1/409.

<sup>241</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 185, 2 Aug 1939, FO 371/23072/C10821/3356/18; Butler to Strang, 5 Aug 1939, Strang Papers, STRN 4/5. Butler preferred a settlement with Germany: Paul Stafford, 'Political Autobiography and the Art of the Plausible: R. A. Butler at the Foreign Office, 1938–1939', *HJ*, 28, 4 (1985), 901–22.

<sup>242</sup> Kennard to FO, 31 Jul 1939, FO 371/23072/C10745/3356/18, minutes.

When the mission arrived in Moscow, Seeds immediately put his finger on the issue raised at the CID about whether to go slow with the military talks.<sup>243</sup> The ambassador pointed out that to do so would compromise the political talks and trigger 'Russian fears that we are not in earnest, and are not trying to conclude a concrete and definite agreement'. This concern was referred to the DCOS, and Drax was given new instructions to move quickly.<sup>244</sup> The sticking point in the negotiations was raised on 14 August. This was the issue of how to get Soviet Russia's neighbours to agree to talks – including about such matters as military assistance and indirect aggression – before events made them 'too late'.<sup>245</sup> Strang, now returned to London, also put this matter to the DCOS on 16 August, where it was agreed that Britain and France should 'approach' the Poles and Romanians on the issue.<sup>246</sup> These efforts were fruitless. Neither the French ambassador to Poland nor his British counterpart, Sir Howard Kennard, could budge Beck.<sup>247</sup>

While this was occurring, on 17 August the conference in Moscow adjourned until 21 August, pending the results of the Anglo-French efforts.<sup>248</sup> The negotiations had not been easy.<sup>249</sup> Drax had found the Soviets to 'speak contemptuously of Britain and France as the yielding (or surrendering) Powers'. The Soviet manner was galling: 'The way they hand to us their demands (not requests) is somewhat in the manner of a victorious power dictating terms to a beaten enemy. They make it plain that in their opinion we come here as supplicants.' In typical Russian fashion, however, 'unofficially, our relations with the Soviet Military Mission have become steadily more cordial since our arrival, partly as a result of two banquets and the consumption of much vodka'; however, 'officially . . . they remain stubborn and dictatorial'.<sup>250</sup>

Over the weekend of 19–20 August, the British attempted to push the Poles further. On 20 August, the Poles were informed that continued intransigence on their part would 'in all probability' result in the

<sup>243</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 196, 12 Aug 1939, minute, Strang (14 Aug), FO to Seeds, tel 209, 15 Aug 1939, and FO to Drax, tel Military Mission 1, 15 Aug 1939, all FO 371/23072/C11275/3356/18.

<sup>244</sup> DCOS, minutes 49th meeting, 14 Aug 1939, Cab 54/2.

<sup>245</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 197, 14 Aug 1939, FO 371/23072/C11323/3356/18, Strang's minute (14 Aug).

<sup>246</sup> DCOS, minutes 51st meeting, 16 Aug 1939, Cab 54/2.

<sup>247</sup> Kennard to FO, tels 270 and 273, 18 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C11580 and C11582/3356/18.

<sup>248</sup> Seeds to FO, tel Military Mission 5A, 17 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C11579/3356/18.

<sup>249</sup> The minutes are DP(P) 70, 'Anglo-French-Soviet Military Delegation Meetings August 1939', H. L. Ismay, 31 Aug 1939, Cab 16/183.

<sup>250</sup> Drax to Chatfield, 16–17 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C12064/3356/18.

Moscow conference ‘break[ing] down altogether’.<sup>251</sup> Halifax made the British view clear to Warsaw: a failure of the negotiations ‘must encourage Herr Hitler to resort to war, in which Poland would bear the brunt of the first attack. On the other hand I believe that the conclusion of a politico-military agreement with the Soviet Union would be calculated to deter him from war.’ But this was of little import. On 21 August, the talks in Moscow were suspended. The text of a Soviet–German commercial agreement, signed 19 August, was announced, and *Pravda* trumpeted this event as possibly ‘prov[ing] to be an important step in the question of further improving not only economic but also political relations between the USSR and Germany’.<sup>252</sup> Two days later, the Nazi–Soviet Pact was signed to the ‘bewilderment’ of many.<sup>253</sup>

The British response was predictably bitter. Seeds accused Molotov of bad faith in his negotiations, and the Soviet commissar returned a charge of a ‘lack of sincerity’.<sup>254</sup> At the Foreign Office, Roberts argued that the ‘Soviet military negotiators’ had been ‘instructed “to lead our people down the garden path” so far as possible and to find some suitable pretext for a break or at least an interruption in the negotiations’ in order to let the German talks come to fruition. Sargent had ‘no doubt at all that this is so’,<sup>255</sup> while Chamberlain wrote of ‘Russian treachery’.<sup>256</sup> While Molotov ‘adopted a manner of almost hearty simplicity’ to Seeds on 25 August – the same day that the military mission left Moscow to begin its journey home – and expressed regret (‘what a pity’) that the British had been unable to budge the Poles, it was evident that Anglo-Soviet relations had plummeted to a low point.<sup>257</sup> The outbreak of war just over a week later only increased the depths of Anglo-Soviet animosity.

<sup>251</sup> FO to Kennard, 20 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C11580/3356/18.

<sup>252</sup> Seeds to FO, tels 204 and 205, 21 Aug 1939, FO 371/23687/N3880 and N3881/411/38.

<sup>253</sup> Nicolson diary entry, 22 Aug 1939, in Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 411; cf. Ironside diary entry, 22 Aug 1939, in Macleod and Kelly, *Ironside Diaries*, 89. Just when and why the Soviets decided to accept the German offer for a pact is controversial. The explanation offered by Ingeborg Fleischauer, ‘Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler–Stalin Pact’, in Bernd Wegner, *From Peace to War. Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Providence, RI, and Oxford, 1997), 27–45, seems more judicious and satisfying, as it explains Soviet policy in its ideological context, than do the arguments made in Robert Manne, ‘Some British Light on the Nazi–Soviet Pact’, *ESR*, 11 (1981), 83–102; see also Geoffrey Roberts, ‘The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany’, *SS*, 44, 1 (1992), 57–78.

<sup>254</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 211, 23 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C11740/3356/18.

<sup>255</sup> Minutes, Roberts (23 Aug) and Sargent (28 Aug) on Drax to Chatfield, 16 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C12064/3356/18.

<sup>256</sup> N. Chamberlain to Hilda, his sister, 27 Aug 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1115.

<sup>257</sup> Seeds to FO, tel 223, 25 Aug 1939, FO 371/23073/C12060/3356/18.



The British have been roundly criticized, both at the time and subsequently, for not concluding an Anglo-French-Soviet treaty.<sup>258</sup> Such an alliance, according to a recent commentator, 'could and should' have been made.<sup>259</sup> Such an assertion immediately provokes two questions: how? And why? The British efforts to effect a tripartite alliance foundered on a number of things, only some of which were under the control of London. In particular, the British had no ability to end the unwillingness of Poland and the Baltic states to be 'guaranteed' in any fashion by Soviet Russia, an issue that was inextricably enmeshed with the arguments about indirect aggression. It can, of course, be argued (as the Soviets did) that the wishes of these states should have been ignored, that the 'greater good' of stopping German aggression took precedence over the sensibilities of lesser nations. This was a line of argument entirely at variance with the concepts of morality that underpinned British strategic foreign policy in the period between the wars.<sup>260</sup> While the British were just able to bring themselves, reluctantly, to jettison *their* concept of collective security, they were not able to take on board the *Soviet* concept, which was a triple alliance with the *casus foederis* to be determined by Moscow. The unilateral British guarantees to Poland and Romania kept the decision for war and peace firmly in British hands; the proposed alliance would not. Further, the British were convinced that the Soviet concept of indirect aggression either would result in the Red Army's moving into Poland and the Baltic states, supposedly to prevent the latter from falling under German control, or would provoke those states into adopting a pro-German stance. It is difficult to see how the aims of British strategic foreign policy would have been any closer to realization with Warsaw occupied by the Soviets than with Warsaw occupied by the Germans.

This brings us to the issue of 'why?' Why 'should' the British have conceded the Soviet demands and signed a treaty? Such an assertion carries with it several assumptions. The first is that to have done so would have stopped Hitler from invading Poland (or at least prevented him from doing so successfully) and thus beginning the Second World War. There is no definitive proof for the first part of this belief. As to the ability of the Red Army to check Hitler, it is evident that the British had

<sup>258</sup> Perhaps the most famous contemporary criticism was 'Cato', *Guilty Men* (London, 1940); most recent criticism is Michael Jabara Carley, 1939. *The Alliance That Never Was and the coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), and Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union 1937–1939* (London and Portland, OR, 2003).

<sup>259</sup> Louise Grace Shaw, 'Attitudes of the British Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union', *D&S*, 13, 1 (2002), 56.

<sup>260</sup> See the suggestive Joseph Charles Heim, 'Liberalism and the Establishment of Collective Security in British Foreign Policy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 5 (1995), 91–110.



no confidence in its capacity to provide much useful help to the Poles or Romanians, much less to defeat Germany. For the British, what a military agreement would do was to ensure Poland and Romania had a secure source of military supplies. A second assumption is that the Soviet offer was genuinely meant and that the Soviets would have carried out their obligations should an alliance have been concluded (assumptions that also underpin similar arguments about the Munich crisis). Here, we are in the dark. But the British certainly were just as suspicious of Soviet good faith as the Soviets were of London's. And, with respect to this latter matter, claims for Soviet perspicacity are condemned by the fact that they strained at the British gnat (by being unwilling to drop their insistence on a particular definition of indirect aggression) but swallowed the German camel (by signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact). By pursuing old-fashioned *Realpolitik*, within the bounds of ideological perception and based on the Leninist concept of 'kto-kogo' (literally, 'who-whom', but with the implied meaning of 'who does what to whom') that Molotov exemplified, the Soviets ensured that their negotiations with Britain would be difficult and, likely, unsuccessful. If blame is to be had, it needs to be shared equally.

But all of this fails to understand the basis of Neville Chamberlain's version of strategic foreign policy and the role that Soviet Russia played in it. Chamberlain never intended to go to war unless absolutely forced to do so. Instead, he wanted to deter war: his preference in military spending to construct a deterrent bomber force and his preference in the alliance talks to keep Soviet Russia out of the German orbit without ceding to Moscow the ability to commit Britain to war underline this approach. Such thinking was revealed on 23 July, when Chamberlain felt that his policies were bearing fruit. 'One thing', he wrote to his sister, 'is I think clear, namely that Hitler has concluded that we mean business and the time is not ripe for the major war.' He then expanded on his views:

Unlike some of my critics I go further and say the longer the war is put off the less likely it is to come at all as we go perfecting our defences and building up the defences of our Allies. That is what Winston & co[mpany] never seem to realise. You don't need offensive forces sufficient to win a smashing victory. What you want are defensive forces sufficiently strong to make it impossible for the other side to win except at such a cost as to make it not worth while.<sup>261</sup>

This was the businessman's calculus that Chamberlain followed, but it was a form of ratiocination that did not appeal to either Hitler or the Japanese, whose calculations were based more on crude Social Darwinism

<sup>261</sup> N. Chamberlain to Ida, his sister, 23 Jul 1939, Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1108.

and concepts of national destiny. Nor did Soviet Russia find Chamberlain's policy, which appeared to it to be both weak and potentially injurious to itself, appealing. Chamberlain was unwilling, in the last resort, to tolerate Germany and Japan's aggressions, but he was not willing to ally with the Soviets to oppose them – at least not on Soviet terms. Like Buridan's famous ass, Chamberlain found himself immobilized between two equally, here unappealing, choices. The choice was made for him when the German troops marched into Poland. Soviet Russia, too, had made its decision. The future of Anglo-Soviet relations would be determined by it.

## Conclusion

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The inter-war period was above all a period of transition in British strategic foreign policy. Great Britain was caught between nineteenth-century concepts of the balance of power, the experimentation that was collective security and old-fashioned alliance diplomacy. The impact of Soviet Russia on this transition was algebraic: the country was a factor in the equation of British strategic foreign policy generally, but it was rarely the dominant one. Soviet Russia's isolation from world affairs for much of the period meant that it remained a looming presence on the periphery of British thinking about how to maintain the new world order that emerged after 1919. However, it was a significant periphery. Soviet Russia both threatened the *status quo* and acted – at least potentially and on occasion – as one of its guardians. This gave Soviet Russia a dual role in British thinking. The ideological menace of communism imperilled the British Empire and, to a lesser extent, even Britain itself, but the military might of Soviet Russia acted as a possible deterrent to both Nazi Germany's and militarist Japan's expansion.

This book has endeavoured to do two things. Its primary aim has been to examine British strategic foreign policy. That goal has been pursued by means of using Britain's interactions with Soviet Russia as a case study for the entire topic – to provide the 'bore-hole' into British policy. While *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* is not a study of Anglo-Soviet relations as such, they are the red thread that ties the book together. Nowhere is this more apparent than when discussing the impact of ideology on British policy.

Resolving this matter turns on a key consideration: was Soviet Russian (for most of the period, this means Stalinist) foreign policy based on *Realpolitik* or communist ideology? This topic is a minefield, and one that is only in part a historical topic. The competing interpretations – the ideological Cold War (also called the 'German') school and the *Realpolitik* or 'realist' school – are set as firmly in contemporary concerns as they are in the historical events of the 1920s and 1930s. The two sobriquets, 'Cold War' and 'German', make evident the 'presentist' concerns

involved. For the Cold War camp, Soviet Russia's policy before 1939 needs to be considered as a prelude to the events after 1945. Thus, given the fact that during and after the Second World War the Red Army overran, occupied and remained in much of eastern Europe, Stalin's policy before the Second World War – particularly the Nazi–Soviet Pact – must be seen as a precursor to these events. This serves two purposes. It provides a retrospective justification for Western, particularly American, policy after 1945 and frees it from any charge that it was Western actions that shattered the wartime Grand Coalition of Britain, Soviet Russia and the United States and caused the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

The 'German' variant is similarly rooted in 'presentist' concerns. By portraying Soviet Russia as an inherently aggressive, expansionist power that continually threatened all of Europe, such accounts do a number of things. First, they allow the argument that Stalin pursued a duplicitous policy during the alliance negotiations with the West in 1939 as he had always intended to sign an agreement with Germany.<sup>2</sup> This is a historical point. But they also act to rehabilitate Hitler and the Nazis, who can be portrayed as valiant and righteous, if somewhat premature and imperfect, defenders of Western civilization.

In a related fashion, realist interpretations are also inspired by 'presentist' concerns. This results from the fact that, if the wind is to be taken out of the sails of the 'German' school, then it is essential to present Stalin as a Soviet Machiavelli – at whatever cost to the historical facts – rather than as a communist Tweedledee to Hitler's Nazi Tweedledum. Thus, Stalin cannot be seen as motivated by any thoughts of communism. Instead he needs to be seen as inspired only by a steely *Realpolitik* worthy of a Bismarck. However, such an approach makes a true understanding of both Anglo-Soviet relations and the Soviet impact on British strategic foreign policy just as impossible as does the Cold War approach. For this reason, it is necessary to demonstrate why it is wrong.

There can be little doubt that Stalin was a communist and that his actions were shaped by this fact.<sup>3</sup> First, there is the simple historical

<sup>1</sup> In passing, it should be noted that the arguments in this book suggest that the *British* Cold War began as early as 1917, and that the Anglo-Soviet co-operation during the Grand Alliance of 1941–5 was an aberration. For useful discussion of the dating of the Cold War, see Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'The Origins of the Cold War: Stalin, Churchill and the Formation of the Grand Alliance', *RR*, 47 (1988), 145–70; D. Cameron Watt, 'Britain, the United States and the Opening of the Cold War', in Ritchie Ovendale, ed., *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945–1951* (Leicester, 1984), 43–60.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion, see Geoffrey Roberts, 'On Soviet–German Relations: The Debate Continues – A Review Article', *E-AS*, 50, 8 (1998), 1471–5.

<sup>3</sup> See Geoffrey Swain, 'Stalin's Wartime Vision of the Postwar World', *D&S*, 7, 1 (1996), 73–96, for an exposition of how this fact affected Stalin's perceptions and policies.

record of Stalin's life as a revolutionary, something that needs little emphasis.<sup>4</sup> However, there is a second point: Stalin's own concern with ideology. Since communism was a movement inspired by and based on political theory, ideological debate was the currency of power in the Bolshevik Party's economy. All aspirants to authority and power in the party's hierarchy had to demonstrate their prowess in the theoretical discussions that were at the centre of all policy making. Stalin was no exception. For example, in 1925 he engaged a special tutor, the Bolshevik professor Jan Stein, to help him improve his understanding of the mysteries of the dialectic. Stalin proved a weak student, but took his revenge by having Stein executed in 1937 as a 'theoretical "lickspittle of Trotsky"'.<sup>5</sup> While Stalin's action was typical of the man, the fact that he took lessons in political philosophy, that he could not permit anyone who realized his theoretical failings to live, and the wording of his denunciation of Stein all underline the importance of political theory both in Soviet politics and for the Soviet leader's career.

It could be argued that Stalin's study of Marxism was merely the ploy of an ambitious man who saw that such an endeavour was necessary to advance his own prospects. While plausible, such a contention has two interconnected defects. The first involves the nature of language. The search for something's 'real' or 'deeper' meaning outside its intellectual framework is at best a dubious and unhistorical process.<sup>6</sup> Language both determines meaning and is in turn determined by its own intellectual (here ideological) matrix. In the study of intellectual history, then, it is impossible, with any certainty, to search for meaning beyond the bounds of that determining framework.<sup>7</sup> In short, what can be said and what can be meant are circumscribed by the vocabulary of a particular ideology. Thus, to argue that, even though Stalin couched his discussions of

<sup>4</sup> For Stalin's early life, see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879–1929. A Study in History and Personality* (New York, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin. Triumph and Tragedy* (Rocklin, CA, 1992), 230–1, quotation from 231.

<sup>6</sup> For a salutary warning about this and an introduction to the issues, see C. Wright Mills, 'Situating Actions and Vocabularies of Motives', in Irving Lewis Horowitz, ed., *C. Wright Mills. Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York, 1963), 439–52. I would like to thank Dr Arnd Bohm for drawing this article to my attention and for his valuable discussion of the topic.

<sup>7</sup> For some insights, see Quentin Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts', *New Literary History*, 3 (1972), 393–408; Skinner, 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', *Political Theory*, 2, 3 (1974), 277–303; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1978), ix–xv; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought', in J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time. Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1973), 3–41.

foreign policy (both publicly and privately) in Marxist terms, they had no intrinsic, *Marxist* meaning and can be 'better' explained in some other framework, is at best pure supposition and at worst misleading.<sup>8</sup>

The second flaw is to argue that Stalin's policy is explicable only in terms of *Realpolitik*. To use Occam's razor to pare away the simplest explanation for Stalin's policy – that it was communist in nature – is a misuse of that invaluable tool. In fact, to make such an argument at all is to have both a limited view of communism and an incomplete understanding of how ideological beliefs affect decision making. Basic Marxism – and Stalin's understanding of Marxism never went much beyond this – presupposes a number of things, including that no long-term accommodation between capitalism and socialism is possible. As a communist, Stalin's perceptions of the world were shaped by such beliefs. He thus naturally believed – and Soviet experiences in the period from 1917 to 1920 would have reinforced this conviction – that Soviet Russia was surrounded by rapacious capitalist states of various (fascist, Nazi, Japanese militarist, bourgeois liberal) stripes.

What was to be done? The answer comes from the fact that Marxism, at least in its Leninist incarnation, posits that the inevitable contradictions in capitalism will result in what might be called the 'capitalist thieves' falling out among themselves. Thus Stalin believed that he would always, in the last resort, be able to make a deal with one or some of them, following on Lenin's dictum that the last capitalist would sell the rope with which to hang himself. As a communist, therefore, Stalin could pursue a policy indistinguishable, but quite different both in its inspiration and in its ultimate goals, from that pursued by any *Realpolitiker*. In short, communism shaped Stalin's decisions and ultimately limited his range of options, but it was a doctrine sufficiently broad enough to allow him to pursue a number of possible courses.

If, then, Stalin was a communist (but not with the implications that the Cold Warriors posit), what does this mean for Anglo-Soviet relations and the Soviet impact on British strategic foreign policy? First, it suggests that those, like Vansittart and Collier, who advocated collaboration with Soviet Russia against the revisionist Powers were correct in their assessment that such a course of action was possible despite Stalin's ideological orientation. Second, and conversely, it also underlines the difficulties of such a collaboration. The fact that Soviet foreign policy

<sup>8</sup> For clear evidence that Stalin framed his foreign policy discussions in Marxist ideology even in private correspondence, see, for example, Stalin to Molotov, 29 Aug 1929, in Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, eds., *Stalin's Letters to Molotov* (New Haven and London, 1995), 174–6.

was communist and essentially hostile to British interests explains why many, like Sargent and O'Malley, were chary of treating with Moscow, for they believed that Stalin both wished to sow discord in the West and to fish in muddy waters for his own advantage. Third, in a related fashion, it cuts the ground from under those who wish to argue that the British should have accepted Soviet offers of co-operation uncritically and that any refusal to do so resulted solely from British ideological prejudice.<sup>9</sup> Finally, it helps to explain why there was a fundamental difference between the two states in their approach to international affairs.

To appreciate this latter point necessitates a consideration of the differing views of power in British and Soviet constructions of the international order. Since class struggle was a fundamental part of Marxism, power necessarily underpinned all Soviet thinking about this topic. This contrasted with much of British thinking. In the inter-war period, under all governments, British policy was essentially liberal, in both its conservative and internationalist variants. One of the essential beliefs in this system, going back to those stalwarts of British liberalism, Richard Cobden and John Bright, was that free trade and universal peace were indissolubly linked. Given this, any use of armed force was an indication that the proper order of things had collapsed. In such a system, there was no room for what Bright termed the 'foul idol' of the balance of power.<sup>10</sup>

This religious imagery, with its moral undertones, found its reflection in British meditations after the Great War about how to maintain the international order. For example, in a discussion of the impending Russo-German Treaty of Berlin, one member of the Northern Department wrote that 'the hairy heel of the old "balance of power" theory' was at the bottom of the agreement.<sup>11</sup> The use of power was somewhat sinful, something best avoided. Co-operation between Britain and Soviet Russia was hampered by their sharply different ideological assumptions about power. Both in the functioning of collective security and in the alliance negotiations of 1939, these differing assumptions were a barrier to any true Anglo-Soviet understanding. The Soviets saw all such

<sup>9</sup> The argument of Michael Jabara Carley, 1939. *The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (London, 1978), 41–51; Richard F. Hamilton, 'On the Origins of the Catastrophe', in Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig, eds., *The Origins of World War I* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), 469–506, esp. 500–1.

<sup>11</sup> The Minute (14 Apr) by Maxse, on D'Abernon (ambassador, Berlin) to FO, disp 196, 8 Apr 1926, FO 371/11791/N1617/718/38.

discussions in terms of power; the British 'liberal conscience', to use Michael Howard's felicitous phrase, shrank from power as a return to the discredited values that had led – and would necessarily lead again – to war. The 'foul idol' was not to be worshipped.

Other aspects of power also need to be considered carefully. In general, any analysis of British strategic foreign policy should avoid any discussion of whether Britain was still the world's foremost power, whether there was any 'transition' in which Britain was superseded as the global hegemon and whether Britain was in the midst of the inevitable 'fall' presupposed by a paradigm of cyclical 'rise and fall'.<sup>12</sup> Such discussions, while interesting in themselves, are more artificial debates among historians than ones likely to provide any insight into the realities of British policy in any particular instance. The essential point about power when considering strategic foreign policy is not just how strong Britain was, but whether its power – both 'hard' and 'soft' – was *sufficient* to enable it to achieve its aims.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1930s, Britain discovered, in both the Manchurian and Abyssinian episodes, that no combination of its 'soft' power – moral suasion, the leadership of the League, public opinion, an appeal to liberal internationalist norms – and its 'hard' power – the traditional accoutrements of Great Power status such as military force and financial and economic strength – was sufficient to force (or persuade) Japan and Italy to cease and desist. In fact, British power was not adequate even to cause either aggressor to be willing to submit to arbitration or conciliation. And, as the 1930s wore on, the times when this was the case – when Britain lacked sufficient power to achieve its desired ends – only multiplied. The realization of this fact was the impetus behind the augmentation of Britain's 'hard' power through rearmament, although 'soft' power, the preferred solution of liberal internationalists, was never completely abandoned. However, it increasingly took the form of a cloak to drape over progressively realist means.

Ideological differences between Britain and Soviet Russia also led to mutual incomprehension and suspicion. For Stalin, all British actions were perceived through Marxist spectacles. British attempts to reach

<sup>12</sup> Arguments advanced in B. J. C. McKercher, *Transition of Power. Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States 1930–1945* (Cambridge, 1999), and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987), 275–343.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion and definition of 'hard' and 'soft' power, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Bound to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990), 108–12, Nye and William A. Owens, 'America's Information Edge', *Foreign Affairs*, 75, 2 (1996), 20–36, esp. 21, and Nye, 'Limits of American Power', *Political Science Quarterly*, 117, 4 (2002–3), 545–59.



accommodations with the 'dictator states' or Japan, in a liberal belief that reasonable men could reach reasonable compromises, were viewed either as indications of weakness or, more sinisterly, as part of a capitalist plot to direct Nazi Germany and Japan against Soviet Russia.<sup>14</sup> For the Soviets, British protests about the need both to work through the League and to consider the sensibilities of the small east European states in 1939 were either signs of insincerity or bargaining ploys designed to keep Soviet Russia in play while Britain cut a deal with Japan and Nazi Germany. For the British, the Soviet insistence on clearly defined alliances and such things as 'indirect aggression' was merely bowing to raw power regardless of moral considerations.

In fact, the Soviet penchant for alliances created one of the most important difficulties for those who shaped British strategic foreign policy. The Franco-Soviet Pact offended a number of British sensibilities. First, it was seen as a return to the policy of secret alliances, the division of the world into blocs and the balance of power, all of which had diminished Britain's freedom of action in 1914. Second, it complicated Anglo-French relations, as any agreement between these two countries would indirectly link Britain to Soviet Russia. 'We are condemned', wrote Leo Amery in 1938, 'to being more and more tied up with a Franco-Russian Alliance (call it the League of Nations if you like!) against the Anti-Comintern gang.'<sup>15</sup> Thus, Soviet Russia became 'that horrible Old Man of the Sea . . . whom France is carrying on her shoulders'.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these problems, there always was the possibility of greater Anglo-Soviet collaboration (co-operation is too strong a word) to block the revisionist Powers. How could, how might, Soviet Russia contribute to the achievement of Britain's strategic foreign policy goals? Here, it is helpful to compare and contrast the circumstances facing and the methods adopted by Britain and Soviet Russia in this respect. Throughout the 1930s, both countries faced the same major threats: militarist Japan was a menace to the interests of both London and Moscow in the Far East; Nazi Germany was similarly a danger to both in Europe. But the methods that the two states employed to meet their similar threats varied sharply. Each response was determined by ideological predilections. From the very beginning, Soviet Russia put its faith in 'hard'

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this kind of thinking in Soviet historiography and a convincing rebuttal, see Robert Manne, 'The Free Hand in the East? British Policy Towards East-Central Europe, Between "Rhineland" and the *Anschluss*', *AJPH*, 32, 2 (1986), 245-62.

<sup>15</sup> Amery to Buchan, 22 Jan 1938, Buchan Papers, Box 9.

<sup>16</sup> Buchan to A. F. Lascelles, 19 Mar 1938, Buchan Papers, Box 9.

power, augmented by its own 'soft' power (subversion and support for revolutionary activities). In contrast, the British reaction was much less defined, more equivocal and hesitating. This was a result of the fact that it was a modern liberal (or 'bourgeois capitalist', to use its Marxist label) state. Its ideology stemmed from a pluralistic society that nurtured a wide spectrum of ideas. These ideas produced contending visions of what to do, and reaching a consensus required time. Thus, from 1933–4 to mid-1937 British strategic foreign policy experimented (or vacillated, to use a harsher term).<sup>17</sup> Various combinations of rearmament, conciliation and negotiation were pursued, including demurely sidling up to Soviet Russia during the hesitant loan discussions of 1935–6.

After this, there was little place – except inadvertently and fleetingly – for Soviet Russia in British strategic foreign policy. The seeming commonality of interests between the two states generated by the fact that they faced the same two threats was insufficient to mask the fact that there was no commonality either of goals or of methods. In sharp contrast to Britain's relations with that other Great Power – the United States of America – whose degree and fashion of participation in international affairs also remained enigmatic, there were no shared values to paper over the gaps in national interests between Britain and Soviet Russia. Just as a British diplomatist a generation earlier had noted that 'common action between an English Liberal and a Russian bureaucracy is a pretty difficult thing to manage', so, too, was finding common ground between British internationalists and Soviet communists.<sup>18</sup> While the British could (and did) factor in Soviet power when considering how to check Japan in Asia – the 'no bloc' policy pursued for most of the 1930s<sup>19</sup> – and to contain Germany in Europe – the alliance talks of 1939 – they could never rely on such deterrence. This was demonstrated by both the Nazi–Soviet Pact and the Russo-Japanese neutrality agreement of 1941. For such inadvertent help was both contingent and dependent on Soviet decisions, and not controlled by British policy. Only the German invasion of Soviet Russia in 1941 could provide the

<sup>17</sup> The difficulties of reshaping the fundamentals of strategic foreign policy for the West since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism should make the British dilemmas of the early 1930s more comprehensible to modern readers.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995), 109.

<sup>19</sup> As outlined in Greg Kennedy, '1935: A Snapshot of British Imperial Defence in the Far East', in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson, eds., *Far-Flung Lines. Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (Portland, OR, and London, 1997), 190–216.

necessary impetus for effective co-operation, and this lasted only as long as the two countries participated in the common struggle.

This is not to suggest, however, except in the widest possible way, that the fact that no Anglo-Soviet agreement was reached in the 1930s was necessarily predetermined by ideological antipathy. As always, much depended on chance and personality. One example makes this point clear. In November 1935, the British foreign secretary perhaps the most ideologically opposed to Soviet Russia, Sir Samuel Hoare, professed himself ready to conclude a loan to Soviet Russia – an act widely viewed as a precursor to wider political talks – in order to prevent any possibility of a Soviet–German *rapprochement*. The track of the ‘hairy heel’ was evident. But, before such talks could begin, Hoare was felled by the reaction to the proposed Hoare–Laval pact and was replaced by Anthony Eden. Eden believed Stalin to be less Bolshevik than *Realpolitiker*,<sup>20</sup> and quashed the loan. This was due in equal parts to his concerns for career, to his dislike of communist propaganda in France, Britain and the empire, and to his belief that the tools of international liberalism wielded by his own adroit hands would be able to bring about an improvement in Anglo-German relations. Of course, whether Hoare could have persuaded the Cabinet to hold Anglo-Soviet political talks, whether, in any case, such talks would have been successful and whether Soviet Russia would have accepted British terms is unknowable. However, it is clear that the simple invocation of ideological antipathy to explain all failings in Anglo-Soviet relations is inadequate.

In fact, staying with this concern, nor does ideological antipathy by itself explain the failure of Chamberlain and Stalin to see eye to eye. Instead, there is a certain irony involved when considering Anglo-Soviet relations during the period when Chamberlain controlled British strategic foreign policy. Both Chamberlain and Stalin – each a dictator in his own context – pursued policies that were motivated by assumptions that were distorted mirror-images of each other. Chamberlain felt that any accord with Soviet Russia would take the decision for war or peace out of his hands and place it in those of the Soviet leaders. For his part, Stalin believed that Britain wished to foment war between Germany and Soviet Russia: to use Moscow’s power to pull Britain’s chestnuts out of the fire. Each believed that the other needed him more than he needed the other; each assumed that his country was more powerful vis-à-vis Germany and Japan than was the case; each disliked the other’s country and ideology.

<sup>20</sup> Eden wrote to Halifax that Stalin ‘seemed to me a man with a complete “Real Politik” outlook and a political descendant of Peter the Great rather than of Lenin’: 22 Jan 1941, Halifax Papers, A4.410.4.15.

So much for Anglo-Soviet relations in the inter-war period. What has this Anglo-Soviet 'core-sample' revealed about the greater sediment of British strategic foreign policy? First, it suggests that, just as the 'Cold War' and '*Realpolitik*' explanations of Soviet policy must be abandoned, historians must rid themselves of the idea that there is a single overarching concept that will explain all of British strategic foreign policy in the inter-war period. Unlike the terrible simplifiers – Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin – from the dictator states, who offered monocausal explanations for historical events, historians must look for more complicated explanations, and ones that may be different in each period of the inter-war era. This means jettisoning such Procrustean concepts as appeasement and 'declinism'.

This takes us to the second point: the Anglo-Soviet 'core-sample' underlines the necessity to consider the issue of *mentalités* generally. The realization that Soviet foreign policy was indeed communist should sensitize us to the need to consider ideology and ideas generally. When this is done, it provides us with a conceptual framework with which to understand British strategic foreign policy. The mental transformation – the end of the primacy of the ideas of the nineteenth century – that the Great War had done so much both to bring about and to accelerate was incomplete in the 1920s and 1930s. However, what was clear was that the certainties of the previous century could no longer be sustained. Einstein's relativity had replaced Newton's clockwork.<sup>21</sup> Heisenberg had enshrined uncertainty as a principle. Schrödinger's cat was both alive and dead. Freud had replaced traditional motivations with the subterranean desires of the unconscious, and psychoanalysis stood in the place of *Self Help*. Indeterminacy was everywhere. 'Whirl', in Aristophanes' phrase, 'was king.'

Such whirl also reigned in politics. The war had either destroyed or discredited both many existing domestic political forms and the existing system for maintaining international order. Gone were the shared values of 1914, although there may have been some 'persistence of the old regime' after 1918.<sup>22</sup> However, for individual states, there seemed many possible paths – communism, fascism and Naziism – to the future. And, in international matters, Wilsonianism and the League contended that

<sup>21</sup> For the linkage between politics and physics, see Paul Forman, 'Weimar Culture, Causality and Quantum Theory, 1918–1927: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Intellectual Environment', in C. Chant and J. Fauvel, eds., *Darwin to Einstein. Historical Studies on Science and Belief* (New York, 1980), 267–302. I would like to thank Dr Arnd Bohm for bringing this article to my attention.

<sup>22</sup> On these points, see Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime. Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981).

the future belonged to them, while extra-European Powers like Japan and the United States gave notice that the old Eurocentric system could not be reconstituted. However, in all cases these domestic and international experiments were both untried and not without their opponents. In fact, the domestic and international experiments were closely interlinked. Revisionist ideologies in Italy and Germany and the expansionist ideology in Japan at best only tolerated the collaborationist tenets of internationalism and rejected outright the maintenance of the *status quo*. The revolutionary ideology of Bolshevism viewed the League as just another running-dog of international finance capital.

Of the European Great Powers, Britain had been the least affected by the Great War. While the British political structure had been shaken, it had survived, and the British élite, the Establishment, had maintained its predominance.<sup>23</sup> The revolutionary political systems that had come to power in Europe found only a few adherents in Britain. This had its effect. British statesmen had difficulties dealing with the different rationalities (and moralities) that guided the dictator states. Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin were men drawn from very different social backgrounds than were British leaders, and the former were guided by ideologies similarly alien to those in Whitehall.<sup>24</sup> Since fascism, Naziism and communism could not be set in traditional British intellectual structures, they were explained in terms of irrationality or immorality. Thus we have a fear of Mussolini's 'mad dog' acts, the description of Hitler's actions as those of a 'lunatic' or a 'mad man' and Simon's contention that Soviet actions were 'beyond ordinary rational calculation'.<sup>25</sup> There was an intellectual barrier that needed to be overcome, and this was rarely done except by the specialists at the Foreign Office. The 'mental maps' held by Britain and the dictator states were not congruent with each other; their statesmen did not share the same 'unspoken assumptions'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> W. D. Rubinstein, 'Britain's Elites in the Inter-War Period 1918–1939', *CBH*, 12, 1 (1998), 1–18.

<sup>24</sup> For recent looks at the necessity to understand Mussolini's Italy in terms of ideology, see Alexander de Grand, 'Mussolini's Follies: Fascism in Its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935–1940', *CEH*, 13, 2 (2004), 127–47, and Paul Corner, 'Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?', *JMH*, 74 (2002), 325–57.

<sup>25</sup> Simon to J. Wylie, 3 Apr 1933, Simon Papers, FO 800/288. See also the observation that 'Hitler and his crew comprise drug addicts, dipsomaniacs, erotomaniacs, sadists. All of them are bullies and megalomaniacs. All of them liars and crooks – most of them assassins into the bargain': Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Buchan, 21 Sept 1939, Buchan Papers, Box 11.

<sup>26</sup> For 'mental maps', see A. K. Hendrickson, 'The Geographical "Mental Maps" of American Foreign Policy Makers', *International Political Science Review*, 1 (1980), 496–530; Zara Steiner, 'Elitism and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Office Before the Great

Given this, we can return to an evaluation of British strategic foreign policy. Before doing so, it is necessary to recapitulate just what were its goals and how they were to be achieved. In general, British aims were quite straightforward and easily defined. The British wished to manage the *status quo*. However, that should not be read as meaning that they were opposed to any changes to it. In fact, as British policy towards both China and India made clear, London was determined to bring British policy more in line with the new sensibilities of the post-war period. Nor was this determination confined to the British Empire. The British shaped their European policy – to the chagrin of many among the foreign-policy making élite who were not convinced that the millennium had arrived – in the context of the new world order of which the League of Nations was only the most obvious manifestation. What the British opposed was unnegotiated change, whether this was brought about by unilateral action, as in the case of German rearmament, or by force of arms, such as Japan's advances in Manchuria or Italy's depredations in Abyssinia. As to means, the British preferred to pursue what they termed a 'general settlement', what would now be called a 'multi-lateral' approach. This could take the form of either collective security through the League or Locarno-style pacts whose mutual guarantees were deemed to be compatible with the Covenant.

With these aims and means in minds, we must now look at the two major periods – those of 'persuasion' and of 'deterrence' – in British strategic foreign policy. The period of 'persuasion' was relatively straightforward, as British 'soft' power was sufficient to maintain their vision of the new world order, although with respect to economics and finances they required American assistance. Looking at the policy of successive foreign secretaries makes this evident. Curzon, whose mental outlook was pre-war and imperial, pursued a policy designed to enlarge the British Empire while bringing an end to the lingering conflicts spawned by the Great War and the collapse of the Russian Empire. MacDonald attempted to follow a liberal internationalist course. He hoped to bring Soviet Russia back into the comity of nations, taming it with the liberal panacea of trade while pursuing arms limitation generally. He had only limited success, at least in part due to the shortness of his time in office. His successor, Austen Chamberlain, had more success. Chamberlain ignored Soviet Russia as much as possible, pursuing a

War', in B. J. C. McKercher and D. J. Moss, eds., *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895–1939. Memorial Essays Honouring C. J. Lowe* (Edmonton, Alberta, 1984), 19–56, and Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, xi–xii. For 'unspoken assumptions' see James Joll, 1914. *The Unspoken Assumptions* (London, 1967).

policy of 'aloofness' towards it. More generally, he maximized Britain's 'soft' power through leadership of the League, and found a typical British compromise to get round the difficulties caused by the fact that Franco-German relations could not be normalized by any of the vague expedients that liberal internationalism permitted. He did this by managing to marry the tenets of liberal internationalism with 'old diplomacy' through the Locarno agreements. These provided a halfway house: they provided concrete guarantees in the fashion of pre-1914 alliances, but were seen as a means to prevent conflicts rather than something that would cause them. However, Chamberlain's success rested on shifting sands. The Locarno agreements were effective only if there was never any need for them to be honoured. The benign international situation that had permitted them to be reached was fragile, and collapsed in 1929 with the world economic crisis. Labour's brief effort to renew its liberal internationalist foreign policy had several successes – the renewal of relations with Soviet Russia, the signing of a Temporary Commercial Agreement with it and the London Naval Conference – but its grip on domestic power was brief and the international situation was rapidly changing. By the end of 1933, the new order created in 1919 had collapsed, and new regimes, implacably hostile to the *status quo* were in power in Italy, Germany, Japan and Soviet Russia.

This ushered in the period of 'deterrence', wherein 'hard' power ruled. From 1933 to mid-1937, British strategic foreign policy lacked any intellectual coherence. The underpinnings of liberal internationalism were shattered, and Austen Chamberlain's Locarno halfway house was unable to be replicated in other regions. General disarmament collapsed for good in 1934. Naval disarmament continued at the 1935 conference. But, while that gathering was successful in ameliorating American suspicions of British good faith, Japan's withdrawal from it marked a final breakdown of efforts at even naval arms limitation. With the League increasingly irrelevant – Germany's and Italy's withdrawals underlining this point – the British were left searching for a replacement means to guarantee their new world order. This led to a series of half-measures. Rearmament was begun by the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, but its breadth was curtailed due to financial exigencies, and its approach was warped by Neville Chamberlain's misunderstanding of strategic and technological issues. Hesitant moves were made towards alliances and agreements – the Stresa front and the Anglo-Soviet loan discussions of 1935–6 – but abandoned.

This muddle was exacerbated by the impact of personalities. Sir John Simon was ill suited to be foreign secretary. As one acute observer recalled, Simon 'approached foreign affairs like a legal case: you fought

the case, won or lost it, and that was the end of the matter. But foreign affairs are not like that; little if anything is finally put to rest.<sup>27</sup> Simon's approach and mentality were more suited to a world in which legalities were both respected and the norm in international affairs. This was not the case during his time in office. Simon was also under the influence of Neville Chamberlain. As a result, in 1934, efforts were made to move Britain closer to Japan, something resulting from the Treasury's belief that this would both limit the need for naval expenditure and moderate Japan's ambitions in East Asia. This was ill advised, as the Foreign Office made clear. Japan's aims in East Asia involved the elimination of Britain's position there. And, importantly, any *rapprochement* with Japan meant a worsening in Anglo-American and Anglo-Soviet relations. With Simon's having no ideas of his own and no drive, British policy floundered.<sup>28</sup>

This might have been repaired when Hoare became foreign secretary. While he initially supported the Treasury's ongoing attempt to improve Anglo-Japanese relations by supporting the Leith-Ross mission, Hoare soon learned the folly of doing so. And he was willing to approach Soviet Russia despite his ideological antipathy to it. But events cut Hoare's career short, and he was replaced by Anthony Eden. Eden's tenure in office was largely a failure. This fact resulted from a number of things. First, he still clung to the ideas of internationalism, a legacy of his time at Geneva. Second, he was vain, inexperienced and ambitious. Eden's desire to be liked was not always an advantage: 'Can your foreign secretary frown?', a senior Conservative peer asked Baldwin, 'can he rap the table?'<sup>29</sup> Third, Eden was unwilling to deal with the dictators due to his personal dislike of them, and he much preferred to put his eggs in the basket of co-operation with the United States. These latter predilections would not necessarily have led to bad foreign policy had Eden remained in office, but they were certainly bad politics, for Neville Chamberlain, when he became prime minister, was determined to treat with Mussolini and had no confidence in Roosevelt. The result was Eden's resignation, something that many attributed as much to personal pique as to policy differences.

<sup>27</sup> Frank Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators. The Destruction and Revival of Europe 1930–1970* (London, 1991), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Sir William Tyrrell, the British ambassador to France, was reported as saying 'that he could not waste his time on John Simon, since he had discovered that "you could load him, but he never fired"': *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Crawford diary entry 22 Mar 1937, in John Vincent, ed., *The Crawford Papers. The Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871–1940 During the Years 1892 to 1940* (Manchester, 1984), 578.



The 'deterrence' period of British strategic foreign policy under Chamberlain was not muddled. Instead, it followed a remorseless pattern shaped by Chamberlain's own mentality and logic. In Chamberlain's approach, Soviet Russia was largely irrelevant and often a nuisance. If Britain lacked sufficient power to attain its ends, Chamberlain argued, then the number of enemies must be reduced. His long-preferred method – squaring the Japanese – was prevented by events: the attack on Knatchbull-Hugessen and the ferocity and brutality of the Japanese campaign in China. But there was another opponent that he believed could be won over: Italy. Here, Chamberlain was duped by Dino Grandi, and the mirage of an Anglo-Italian understanding continued to retreat into the distance, although the attempt to follow it was never abandoned. Chamberlain's efforts to buy off Germany by means of economic appeasement and colonial concessions reflected just what a gap there was between his businessman's mentality, in which bargains were made on the basis of a careful calculation of mutual advantage, and that of Hitler, whose notions of *Volk*, *Lebensraum* and *Weltmacht* rested on intellectual foundations completely separate from those of Adam Smith, the Manchester School and the imperial preference of Chamberlain's father.<sup>30</sup>

Chamberlain's conceit, contempt for his advisers and his genuine hatred of war combined to make him keep the control of British strategic foreign policy firmly in his own hands. Chamberlain disliked the idea of alliances. He realized that joining with the French, whom he disliked and did not trust, would mean that Britain might be dragged into war by the actions of Paris. Here, the Franco-Soviet Pact was anathema, for, if London were linked with Paris, this extended Britain's liabilities even further and potentially put the decision for war or peace into the hands of the Bolsheviks. And, as the negotiations with Soviet Russia in 1939 revealed, the mental and moral gap between the two states was too wide to be bridged. The fact that Chamberlain honoured his pledge to Poland in September puts paid to the argument that Stalin was right to be suspicious of British sincerity, and underlines the fact that the Anglo-Soviet talks collapsed because of Soviet intransigence and a lack of common interests between the two states.

British strategic foreign policy from 1919 to 1939 was distinguished by the disappointment of great expectations. Those who had hoped for the dawning of a new era after the Great War found that the new world order created in 1919 was a fragile one incapable of dealing with the

<sup>30</sup> For them, see Andrew J. Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies* (Basingstoke and London, 1988), 207–40.

stern realities of international politics. The new Jerusalem that many had hoped to build to redeem and to justify the sacrifices of the First World War did not come about. Instead, the clash of ideas that was such a feature of the inter-war period became a clash of arms. This was not the fault of the British, nor merely the result of their flawed policies or strategies. Rather, it was due to the actions of others, including Stalin, who refused to accept the new world order. As the British discovered, the pursuit of peace still depended on power.

## Appendix I

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### ASSISTANT AND DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARIES, FOREIGN OFFICE, 1919–1939

(excluding establishment, finance and legal)

#### A. Assistant undersecretaries

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| Name                       | Dates of service         |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Craigie, Robert Leslie     | 15 Jan 1935–3 Aug 1937   |
| Crowe, Eyre                | 11 Jan 1912–1920         |
| Douglas-Scott, D. J. M.    | 30 May 1938–?            |
| Graham, Ronald W.          | 1 Nov 1916–1919          |
| Gregory, John Duncan       | 1 May 1925–1928          |
| Lindsay, Ronald C.         | 1 Jan 1921–2 Feb 1924    |
| Montgomery, C. H.          | 1 Aug 1922–31 Aug 1930   |
| Mounsey, George Augustus   | 15 Jul 1929–1939         |
| Oliphant, Lancelot         | 30 Apr 1930–1939         |
| Sargent, Orme Garton       | 14 Aug 1933–10 Sept 1939 |
| Strang, William            | 11 Sept 1939–1943        |
| Tyrrell, William G.        | 1 Oct 1918–30 Apr 1925   |
| Wellesley, Victor A. A. H. | 2 Feb 1924–30 Apr 1925   |

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#### B. Deputy undersecretaries

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| Name                       | Dates of service       |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Cadogan, Alexander M. G.   | 1 Oct 1937–31 Dec 1937 |
| Montgomery, C. Hubert      | 1 Sept 1930–1933       |
| Oliphant, Lancelot         | 1 Mar 1936–1939        |
| Sargent, Orme Garton       | 11 Sept 1939–1946      |
| Wellesley, Victor A. A. H. | 1 May 1925–1 Oct 1936  |

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## Appendix II

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### HEADS OF CENTRAL, FAR EASTERN AND NORTHERN DEPARTMENTS, FOREIGN OFFICE, 1923–1939 (prior to 1923, department heads are not indicated)

#### A. Central Department

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| Name                 | Dates of service        |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Lampson, Miles W.    | 1923–Oct 1926           |
| Sargent, Orme Garton | Oct 1926–Aug 1933       |
| Wigram, Ralph F.     | Aug 1933–Dec 1936       |
| Strang, William      | Dec 1936–11 Sept 1939   |
| Kirkpatrick, Ivonne  | 11 Sept 1939–8 Apr 1940 |

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#### B. Far Eastern Department

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| Name                       | Dates of service        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Wellesley, Victor A. A. H. | 1923–1 Feb 1924         |
| Waterlow, S. P.            | 1 Feb 1924–1926         |
| Mounsey, George Augustus   | 1926–15 Jul 1929        |
| Orde, Charles William      | 15 Jul 1929–23 Apr 1938 |
| Howe, Robert George        | 23 Apr 1938–1942        |

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#### C. Northern Department

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| Name                     | Dates of service       |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Gregory, John David      | 1923–30 Apr 1925       |
| Mounsey, George Augustus | 30 Apr 1925–1926       |
| Palairret, C. M.         | 1926–1 Dec 1928        |
| Villiers, Gerald Hyde    | 1 Dec 1928–9 Apr 1929  |
| Seymour, Horace James    | 9 Apr 1929–17 Oct 1932 |
| Collier, Laurence        | 17 Oct 1932–1941       |

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## Appendix III

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MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL, FAR EASTERN AND  
NORTHERN DEPARTMENTS, FOREIGN OFFICE, 1919-1939  
(dates of service as they appear in the *Foreign Office Lists*; \* = member of  
the Consular Service; + temporary appointment)

A. Central Department: in 1919, relations with Germany were supervised by the  
War Department

| Year | Members                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1919 | G. S. Spicer, L. Oliphant, Lord Drogheda, +Lord G. Wellesley, C.<br>Howard Smith, L. Collier                                                                            |
| 1920 | L. Oliphant, Hon. A. M. G. Cadogan, S. P. Waterlow, F. E. F. Adam, A.<br>Leeper, R. F. Wigram, G. P. Churchill, +W. V. Cooper                                           |
| 1921 | S. P. Waterlow, A. M. G. Cadogan, H. G. Nicolson, H. W. Brooks, R. F.<br>Wigram, J. M. Troutbeck, H. A. C. Williams                                                     |
| 1922 | S. P. Waterlow, A. M. G. Cadogan, H. G. Nicolson, H. W. Brooks, R. F.<br>Wigram, C. W. E. Cradock-Hartopp, J. M. Troutbeck                                              |
| 1923 | A. M. G. Cadogan, H. G. Nicolson, R. F. Wigram, J. L. Dodds, N. M.<br>Butler, J. M. Troutbeck, J. C. Sterndale-Bennett                                                  |
| 1924 | W. H. M. Selby, H. G. Nicolson, R. F. Wigram, C. W. Baxter, A. F.<br>Aveling, N. M. Butler, J. H. LeRougetel, J. M. Troutbeck, J. C.<br>Sterndale-Bennett               |
| 1925 | H. G. Nicolson, C. Howard Smith, C. W. Baxter, A. F. Aveling, J. M.<br>Troutbeck, J. C. Sterndale-Bennett, J. V. Perowne, Sir Adrian Baillie,<br>Bart., J. H. F. McEwen |
| 1926 | O. G. Sargent, C. Howard Smith, O. C. Harvey, C. W. Baxter, C. H.<br>Bateman, A. F. Aveling, J. M. Troutbeck, J. C. Sterndale-Bennett,<br>J. V. Perowne, M. H. Huxley   |
| 1927 | C. Howard Smith, O. C. Harvey, C. H. Bateman, A. F. Aveling, J. M.<br>Troutbeck, J. V. Perowne, M. H. Huxley                                                            |
| 1928 | C. Howard Smith, O. C. Harvey, C. H. Bateman, J. V. Perowne,<br>W. H. B. Mack, M. H. Huxley, E. E. Crowe                                                                |
| 1929 | C. Howard Smith, O. C. Harvey, C. H. Bateman, C. F. A. Warner, J. V.<br>Perowne, M. H. Huxley, E. E. Crowe                                                              |
| 1930 | O. St. C. O'Malley, J. Balfour, E. H. Carr, E. E. Crowe, D. L. Busk                                                                                                     |

|      |                                                                                                            |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1931 | O. St. C. O'Malley, J. Balfour, P. B. B. Nichols, D. J. Cowan, R. M. A. Hankey                             |
| 1932 | O. St. C. O'Malley, J. Balfour, P. B. B. Nichols, D. J. Cowan, R. M. A. Hankey                             |
| 1933 | J. V. T. W. T. Perowne, P. S. Scrivener, R. M. A. Hankey, P. M. Crosthwaite                                |
| 1934 | C. W. Baxter, J. V. T. W. T. Perowne, A. R. Dew, P. M. Crosthwaite, M. J. Creswell                         |
| 1935 | C. W. Baxter, J. V. T. W. T. Perowne, A. R. Dew, M. J. Creswell, V. G. Lawford                             |
| 1936 | C. W. Baxter, J. V. T. W. T. Perowne, V. G. Lawford, H. A. C. Rumbold                                      |
| 1937 | C. W. Baxter, C. J. W. Torr, R. E. Barclay, V. G. Lawford, H. A. C. Rumbold, C. D. W. O'Neill              |
| 1938 | C. W. Baxter, W. I. Mallet, F. K. Roberts, R. E. Barclay, V. G. Lawford, P. F. Hancock                     |
| 1939 | I. A. Kirkpatrick, R. M. Makins, R. L. Speaight, F. K. Roberts, R. E. Barclay, M. J. Creswell, R. W. Selby |

## B. Far Eastern Department

| Year | Members                                                                                                                       |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1919 | Hon. P. W. M. Ramsay, J. W. O. Davidson*                                                                                      |
| 1920 | C. H. Bentinck, J. J. Prideaux-Brune*, M. B. T. Paske Smith*                                                                  |
| 1921 | M. W. Lampson, B. C. Newton, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, C. F. A. Warner, A. E. Eastes*, C. W. Campbell+                         |
| 1922 | M. V. Lampson, B. C. Newton, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, E. O. Coote, C. F. A. Warner, H. E. Sly*, G. H. Phipps, C. W. Campbell+ |
| 1923 | B. C. Newton, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, E. O. Coote, C. F. A. Warner, E. H. Carr, H. F. Handley-Derry*, C. W. Campbell+        |
| 1924 | B. C. Newton, L. Collier, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, E. H. Carr, J. F. Brenan*, C. W. Campbell+                                 |
| 1925 | B. C. Newton, L. Collier, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, H. Dobinson, E. W. P. Mills*                                               |
| 1926 | B. C. Newton, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, W. Strang, C. M. Patrick, H. Dobinson, J. T. Pratt*, G. S. Moss*                       |
| 1927 | F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, W. Strang, K. R. Johnstone, J. T. Pratt*, W. S. Toller*                                              |
| 1928 | F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, W. Strang, K. R. Johnstone, C. E. Steel, J. T. Pratt*, W. S. Toller*                                 |
| 1929 | F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, W. Strang, C. E. Minns, J. T. Pratt*, W. S. Toller*                                                  |
| 1930 | D. MacKillop, C. Bramwell, Sir J. T. Pratt*, J. C. Hutchison*                                                                 |
| 1931 | D. MacKillop, C. Bramwell, N. H. H. Charles, F. K. Roberts, Sir J. T. Pratt*, C. E. Whitamore*                                |

- 1932 D. MacKillop, N. H. H. Charles, F. K. Roberts, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, C. E. Whitamore\*
- 1933 V. A. L. Mallet, R. J. Bowker, P. Broad, G. W. Harrison, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, A. L. Scott\*
- 1934 A. W. G. Randall, W. R. Connor Green, R. H. S. Allen, S. G. Harcourt-Smith, G. W. Harrison, Hon. W. N. McG. Hogg, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, S. L. Burdett\*
- 1935 A. W. G. Randall, R. H. S. Allen, S. G. Harcourt-Smith, G. W. Harrison, J. Chaplin, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, R. A. Hall\*
- 1936 R. H. S. Allen, S. G. Harcourt-Smith, J. T. Henderson, J. Chaplin, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, R. A. Hall\*
- 1937 N. B. Ronald, J. T. Henderson, J. Chaplin, R. D. J. Scott Fox, R. P. Heppel, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, G. W. Addington+
- 1938 N. B. Ronald, J. T. Henderson, J. Chaplin, R. P. Heppel, M. J. R. Talbot, Sir J. T. Pratt\*, Sir J. F. Brenan\*, W. J. Davies\*, A. L. Scott\*
- 1939 N. B. Ronald, R. P. Heppel, M. J. R. Talbot, J. P. E. C. Henniker-Major, Sir J. F. Brenan\*, A. L. Scott\*, M. E. Dening\*

C. Northern Department: In 1919, relations with Russia were supervised by the Russia Department

| Year | Members                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1919 | H. F. C. Crookshank, G. G. M. Vereker, V. F. W. Cavenish-Bentinck, Major S. Alley+, P. Leigh-Smith+, R. Ward+                                                                                        |
| 1920 | C. M. Palairat, R. H. Hoare, O. St. C. O'Malley, H. F. C. Crookshank, R. G. Howe, O. C. Harvey, P. Leigh-Smith, E. W. Birse+, P. V. Emrys-Evans+, Ll. K. Jones+, A. S. F. Gascoigne+, H. F. B. Maxse |
| 1921 | E. Ovey, O. St. C. O'Malley, R. A. Leeper, P. Leigh-Smith, H. F. C. Crookshank, O. C. Harvey, R. C. S. Stevson, J. C. W. Torr, P. V. Emrys-Evans+, H. F. B. Maxse+                                   |
| 1922 | E. Ovey, G. R. Warner, O. St. C. O'Malley, R. A. Leeper, O. C. Harvey, P. M. Roberts, Sir J. L. Dashwood, Bt., H. F. B. Maxse, P. V. Emrys-Evans+                                                    |
| 1923 | E. Ovey, G. R. Warner, W. H. M. Selby, O. St. C. O'Malley, R. A. Leeper, R. Dunbar, P. M. Roberts, Sir J. L. Dashwood, Bt.                                                                           |
| 1924 | E. Ovey, O. St. C. O'Malley, G. A. D. Ogilvie-Forbes, W. Strang, P. M. Roberts, H. F. B. Maxse, J. H. F. McEwen                                                                                      |
| 1925 | O. St. C. O'Malley, G. A. D. Ogilvie-Forbes, W. Strang, H. F. B. Maxse, E. H. Carr, C. B. P. Peake                                                                                                   |
| 1926 | L. Collier, H. F. B. Maxse, A. H. Hamilton-Gordon, C. B. P. Peake                                                                                                                                    |
| 1927 | C. W. Orde, L. Collier, A. D. F. Gascoigne, A. H. Hamilton-Gordon                                                                                                                                    |
| 1928 | C. W. Orde, L. Collier, P. Leigh Smith, H. L. Baggallay, P. Gent+                                                                                                                                    |
| 1929 | Hon. F. G. Agar-Bobartes, L. Collier, H. L. Baggallay, S. Harcourt-Smith, P. Gent+                                                                                                                   |

- 1930 L. Collier, C. H. Bateman, H. L. Baggallay, S. Harcourt-Smith, P. N. Loxley, A. J. Cave+
- 1931 L. Collier, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, C. H. Bateman, W. H. Montagu-Pollock, J. M. K. Vyvyan, H. M. Grove+
- 1932 L. Collier, F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, C. H. Bateman, J. V. W. T. Perowne, W. H. Montagu-Pollock, J. M. K. Vyvyan, H. M. Grove+
- 1933 F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, R. G. Howe, E. A. Walker, J. D. Greenway, R. E. Barclay, H. M. Grove+
- 1934 R. G. Howe, T. A. Shone, R. L. Speaight, P. F. Gray, H. M. Grove+
- 1935 J. L. Dodds, R. L. Speaight, P. F. Gray, B. A. B. Burrows, H. M. Grove+
- 1936 J. L. Dodds, R. L. Speaight, P. F. Gray, B. A. B. Burrows, H. M. Grove+
- 1937 G. G. M. Vereker, E. A. Walker, G. P. Labouchere, B. A. B. Burrows, P. S. Falla, H. M. Grove+
- 1938 R. H. Hadow, E. A. Walker, B. A. B. Burrows, P. S. Falla, A. S. Halford
- 1939 D. W. Lascelles, B. E. F. Gage, A. S. Halford, J. M. Addis
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Adm 116: Admiralty Secretariat Papers

Adm 205: First Sea Lord

### **Air**

Air 5: Air Historical Branch, 1919–1930

Air 9: Director of Plans

### **Cabinet Office**

Cab 2: CID: Minutes

Cab 3: Home Defence Memoranda (CID)

Cab 4: Miscellaneous Memoranda (CID)

Cab 5: Colonial Defence Memoranda (CID)

Cab 6: India Memoranda (CID)

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Cab 21: Registered Files

Cab 23: Minutes to 1939

Cab 24: Memoranda to 1939

Cab 27: Committees: General Series to 1939

Cab 47: War Trade Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in time of war (ATB)

Cab 48: CID: Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries

Cab 53: Chiefs of Staff Committee

Cab 54: Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee

Cab 55: Joint Planning Committee (1927–1939)

Cab 56: Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (July 1936–1939)

Cab 127: Horace Wilson Papers

### **Foreign Office**

FO 371: General Correspondence: Political  
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Germany (1933–39)

Japan (1931–39)

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Miscellaneous volumes for Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, League of Nations, Poland, Spain, Turkey and USA

FO 794: Private Office: 'Individual' Files

FO 800: Private Office: Miscellaneous

### **Premier's Office**

Prem 1: Prime Minister's Office to 1940

### **Treasury**

T 160: Finance Department: Registered Files (F series)

T 161: Supply Department: Registered Files (S series)

T 172: Chancellor of the Exchequer's Office: Miscellaneous Papers

T 175: Treasury: Papers of Sir Richard Hopkins

T 176: Treasury: Papers of Sir Frederick Phillips

T 188: Treasury: Frederick Leith-Ross Papers

T 273: Treasury: Papers of Lord Bridges (1920–1956)

### **War Office**

WO 106: Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence

WO 190: MI3 Appreciations for the General Staff

WO 193: Directorate of Military Operations (1939–1945)

WO 208: Directorate of Military Intelligence (1939–1945)

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Baldwin Cambridge University Library

Buchan Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Ontario

Cadogan Churchill College Archives Centre (ACAD), Cambridge University;  
FO 800/293–94

Cecil Add MSS 51071–51204, British Library

Chamberlain, A. FO 800/256–63

Chamberlain, N. Birmingham University Library

Chatfield National Maritime Museum

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 Loraine FO 1011  
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 Mallet Churchill College Archives Centre (MALT), Cambridge University  
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 Phipps Churchill College Archives Centre (PHPP), Cambridge University  
 Pratt School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London  
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